

**Rewriting the Self:**  
**A Study of the Poetry of Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz**  
**Dharker**

***Dissertation***

**Submitted in partial fulfilment  
of  
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**by**

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**Under the Supervision of  
Dr Iffat Maqbool**



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### *Certificate*

This dissertation titled **Rewriting the Self: A Study of the poetry of Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker** submitted by **Ms Naziyah Nabi** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy in English**, is an independent and original piece of research work carried out under my supervision. This research work has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any university/Institute for any degree. The candidate has fulfilled all the statutory requirements for the submission of this dissertation.

**Dr Iffat Maqbool**  
**Supervisor**

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# **Introduction**

Literary Feminism is primarily a female-centered literary programme that aims at a de-recognition of the linear absolutes of male history. Feminist literature has throughout sought to deconstruct social ‘myths’ about women (perpetuated by the normative male canon) and concurrently reconstructs suppressed female narratives. Female writing seeks to liberate the nuanced and complex notion of ‘womanhood’ from the stereotypical representation of women in male-centric writings. Hence the notion of a ‘retrieval’ of female subjectivity is essential to all feminist literature. Some of the most defining theoretical concepts of literary feminism were propounded by Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva et al.

Although no clear feminist theoretical framework is identifiable in India, the efforts of feminist-activists like Madhu

Kishwar, Uma Chakravarty, Vrinda Nabar et al have made an immense contribution to the promotion of feminist causes in contemporary times. Feminism in India has interestingly been less of an ivory tower effort and more of grass-roots enterprise. Feministic consciousness in India has helped free women from the age-old patriarchal, religious tradition. Its pragmatic actions like spread of education, economic self-sufficiency, preservation of the rights of women and particularly creating awareness for liberation from conservative super-structures which constrain women socially, physically as well as psychologically are commendable.

Indian literary feminism especially as evidenced in women's writing in English, on the other hand is a vital, living tradition and is traceable in poetry to Toru Dutt in nineteenth century colonial India, in novel writing to Attia Hossein, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande et al in the modern times. No significant woman poet is identifiable until Kamala Das (1934 - 2009) created a splash with her fiercely individualistic and iconoclastic poetry.

Modern Indian English poetry written by women found its first genuine representative in the fiercely individualistic and iconic figure of Das. Anti-stereotypical and candid, her poetry is foundational to any notion of a female-centric aesthetic in Indian

women's poetry in English. She took Indian poetry in English far-ahead of her predecessors like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. An exemplary poet, Kamala Das's fine exploration of the female psyche remains unparalleled.

Given the monumental achievement of Kamala Das, it is pertinent to look for women's voices that possibly perpetuate the feministic tradition embodied by her. Amongst her contemporaries, Gauri Deshpande, Imtiaz Dharker and Mamta Kalia are prominent in their carrying forward of the poetic legacy of Das. While it is true that Kamala Das created a climate for the female 'I' to erupt in Indian women's poetry in English, poets like Dharker and Kalia, in particular explore newer terrain in their respective exploration of the female psyche rejecting masculine mediation. These poets celebrate, often in contradictory ways, the "difference" that separates man and woman. The perennial theme of the quest of the female self gets fresh inputs from these poets who portray the conflicts between traditional structures and an emerging female 'I'. The tussle between a normative social order and the individualistic demands of these women poets has led to the establishing of a well-defined female aesthetic in modern Indian poetry.

Mamta Kalia (b.1940) is a significant post Kamala Das voice. Although as subjective as Kamala Das in her frequent use of



the 'I', the assertive self in her transcends the romantic agony of Das in favour of a more ironic mode. She has written only two collections of poetry in English which have been under taken for research. The first collection *Tribute to Papa And Other Poems* (1970) scorns the father figure for his bourgeois respectability and 'decency', and through her second collection *Poems '78* (1978) she depicts the condition of Indian middle class women and revolts against the firmly established traditional culture in a self-revelatory and ironic mode. She takes from Kamala Das the confessional tone yet infuses a new vigour with her, "stripped down style, street language and forcefulness." (King,2001:155)

Imtiaz Dharker (b.1954), a poet-cum-artist, has published five books of poetry. Accompanied by an exhibition of drawings and paintings, her poetry confronted the theme of suppression of women by societal forces--cultural, religious and political. The present study tries to explore how Dharker, belonging to the Muslim community mocks the roles in which women are imprisoned under Muslim patriarchy and how this rebellion against her Islamic upbringing creates a dynamic feministic voice in Indian English poetry. For this purpose two of her collections *Purdah and Other Poems* (1989) and *I Speak For The Devil* (2001) have been studied. An attempt has been made to explore the various issues

and concerns of women in the Indian society in general and the Muslim culture in particular. She also underlines the precariousness of the lives of Indian Muslims in a country that has turned savagely communal due to an emerging religious fundamentalism.

The poetry of Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker is analyzed in order to bring out the distinctive ways in which both poets enrich female writing with their nuanced or open rebellion against male-centric discourse. In their relentless pursuit of a female identity, both poets challenge complacent and traditional stereotypes and have effectively displaced Indian English writing from its ‘traditional male-dominated centers’.

The present study has been divided into four chapters excluding the Introduction and Conclusion.

In the first chapter “Indian Women’s Poetry in English: A Survey”, an attempt has been made to explore the conditions which gave rise to a female literary tradition and how different literary feminists try to rewrite themselves both in the west and East by deconstructing notions created and developed by patriarchy throughout history. In this regard, some of the ground breaking literary works written by literary feminists such as, Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter et al have been taken into

consideration. Apart from this, an attempt has been made to explore the indigenous roots of feminism in India and the contribution of some of India's pioneering feminists like Tarabai Shinde, Cornelia Sorabji, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain et al has been highlighted. After independence, the works of women like Leela Kasturi, Gail Omvedt, Illina Sen put forth the basic cause of women's oppression in post-colonial India and contemporary feminists like Madhu Kishwar, Maitrayee Chaudhuri struggled and tried to re-explore traditional concepts to open up new possibilities for Indian feminism.

Apart from this, an attempt has been made to identify the rise of an Indian literary feminism in Indian English writing, which is vital, living and as old as literature in India itself, especially in poetry and its significant manifestations. Starting with Toru Dutt, the first Indian woman poet in English, the works of all major women poets in the colonial India like Sarojini Naidu have been traced as well as the conditions which did not provide them the opportunity to initiate a movement in Indian women's poetry in English as was later done by Kamala Das.

Kamala Das takes a sudden turn from her predecessors with the publication of *Summer In Calcutta* in the 1960's, inaugurating a new movement in women's poetry in English. She attacks a whole

way of life characterised by patriarchal norms in a frank and uninhibited style. Her poetry witnesses a change from an early romanticism to a more realistic, bold/candid and experimental poetry. So in this chapter a survey has been done to explore the feministic poetic tradition inaugurated by Kamala Das and the voices after her like Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza, Sunita Jain, Debyani Chatterjee, Tara Patal, Sujata Bhatt, Margaret Chatterjee, Mukta Sambrani, Menka Shivdasani and many more who followed the ways trodden by her and contributed to an exploration of the feminist aesthetic in varied ways:

We are all alike, / We women,  
In our wrappings of hairless skin/  
All skeletons are alike,/Only the souls vary  
That hide somewhere between the flesh  
And the bone.

(Das, 1973:03)

The second chapter “Revolt against Repressive Patriarchy in Mamta Kalia’s Poetry” discusses the various issues and concerns regarding women raised by Kalia in her poetry. In a highly sarcastic tone, she presents the life of an urban middle class woman and her predicament in society, her ennui and sufferings in a male-dominated world. Her main preoccupation is the boredom of various human-relationships, failures and frustrations of married life, indifference faced by women inside and outside their homes

and some mind boggling social issues. Irony is the main weapon used by her.

The third chapter “Dharker’s Rebellion against Religious Laws” deals with the response of the poet to the deeply entrenched religious values which create havoc for women under patriarchal culture especially in a Muslim community. Starting with the Purdah poems and how Purdah apart from a veil of the body becomes a “state of mind”, it ends with the ‘Devil’ poems where Dharker successfully leaves behind all the vicious forces which become a barrier in her individual freedom and development. As religion figures out to be main subject of critical analysis in Dharker’s poetry, its unjust practices particularly against women are discussed in detail in this chapter.

The fourth chapter, “Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker: A comparison” takes up a comparative study of the two poets. The comparison is done on the grounds of various similarities and differences found in their poetry e.g choice and treatment of theme, language, style and technique and the different figurative, rhetorical and stylistic devices used by them. There are a number of issues which are common concerns to both the poets like unhappy experiences and suffocations of love-less marriages, suppression by family, cruelty of men towards women, house-hold

drudgery, identity crises and much more and yet they differ as they belong to two different cultural faiths and backgrounds, so respond to various issues according to their own individual experiences and exposure. Their shared and divergent feministic techniques are also highlighted. Kalia's poems are simple and colloquial but have high undercurrents of irony and sarcasm whereas Dharker's poetry is complex-filled with literal devices such as metaphors, images and symbols apart from irony. Both poets diverge from tradition and express their concern for the social, cultural and political conditions and satirize authoritative forces.

The conclusion sums up the detailed observations and arguments made in the above chapters and touches the future course of Indian poetry in English by women.

# Chapter I

## Indian Women's poetry in English: A Survey



1.Toru Dutt(b.1856) 2.Sarojini Naidu(b.1879) 3.Kamala Das(b.1934) 4.Eunice de Souza(b.1940) 5.Sunita Namjoshi(b.1941) 6.Sunita Jain(b.1941) 7.Gauri Deshpande(b.1942) 8.Lakshmi Kannan(b.1947) 9.S Radhamani(b.1949) 10.Meena Alexander(1951) 11.Debyani Chatterjee(b.1952) 12.Melanie Silgado(b.1956) 13.Sujata Bhatt(1956) 14.Menka Shivdasani(b.1961) 15.Mukta Sambrani(b.1975) 16.Rukmini Bhaya Nair.

Feminism as a self-conscious political movement originated in the West in the late nineteenth century with its primary concern to end patriarchal domination/modes of thinking that often resulted in oppression and exploitation of women within and outside the familial sphere. The movement mainly arose in order to achieve social, economic and political rights equal to that of men. Broadly, the movement involves, as Barbara Berg defines, “numerous phases of women’s emancipation” (Tandon, 2008:26) and the efforts made to eradicate the concept of gender construction which is man-made.

Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 brings into focus, through her seminal work, *A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women* that it is because of the deprivation of education and upbringing of women in patriarchal set ups that they are taught to internalise the concepts dictated by males during their process of socialisation, which results in their exploitation and oppression and limited



expectations. She stresses education in order to ensure a change in social attitude, so that both sexes could enjoy equal status in social and economic contexts.

It was not only education and financial independence of which women were deprived, but they also fought a long battle against male ideology which virtually silenced them into obedience. Interestingly, the male literary canons also condemn the women's literary endeavours as inferior and show scorn for their literary works. In order to perpetuate the gender ideologies male writers often depict women, as 'obedient daughters', 'modest wives', 'motherly figures' et al who are inevitably 'self-sacrificing', in their literary works.

It is only in the twentieth century that women began to demand their political rights and a number of major feminist literary figures such as Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter et al question the historical representation of women by male authors. By re-writing themselves, they attempted to provide alternative histories of women as opposed to women's histories written by men in literature. They present such theoretical models of feminism which successfully deconstruct several age-old binaries and gender politics which were dominant in philosophical and

political thinking. These western literary feminists did a commendable job in theorising the issues and problems of women in a patriarchal society where their inner feelings were always suppressed, hence the consequent need to articulate them openly and boldly and argue against the silencing of women by the authorial discourse in history. So their main concern and emphasis was on a rewriting of a literary tradition from a female point of view.

Virginia woolf (1882-1941) in her essay, *A Room Of One's Own* (1929) raised issues like the social and economic context of women's writings and advocated financial and psychological independence for women so that they can exercise their creative powers/ability freely. She also questioned the nature of language which is gendered, emphasised a need to go back through literary history and establish a female literary tradition.

Simone-de-Beauvoir (1908-86) explored through *The Second Sex* (1949) that "one is not born rather becomes a woman" (1984:59) as womanhood as we know it, is a social construct, and a result of various societal forces. Women are thrown to the margins as men occupy a central position and prescribe various values which are reflected in art, religion and culture that show the

subordination of women at various levels of society. As the values are created/ constructed by men, not by women, they also use religion to motivate the women to accept her subordinate position as willed in heaven by God himself. Beauvoir argues:

Men fundamentally oppress women by characterising them on every level, as the 'other', defined exclusively in opposition to men. He extends out into the world to impose his will on the world whereas the women is doomed to immanence or inwardness. He creates, acts, invents; she waits for him to save her." (De-Beauvoir,1984:318)

The *Second Sex* ( French *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (1949)) is regarded as the Bible of feminist literature in which Simon de Beauvoir presents the oppressive treatment of women throughout history as the 'other' sex.

Elaine Showalter (b.1941), founder of feminist criticism in the United States, developed the concept 'gynocriticism' in her essay "Towards a Feministic Poetics" which analyzes different literary works written by women and their themes, genres, styles and structures and the psycho-dynamics of female creativity throughout history. In order to trace/identify the evolution of a female literary tradition, Showalter through *A Literature Of Their Own* (1977) identifies three phases of women's writings, a *feminine* phase (1840-80) where women writers imitate male models, a *feminist* phase (1880-1920) during which women writers challenged those

models and their values; and the *female* phase (1920-present) in which women writers advocate their own perspectives.

Kate Millet (b.1934) took up the issue of female sexuality and women's representation in literature. She uses the concept of patriarchy to provide a theoretical examination of women's oppression in her book *Sexual Politics* (1969). She considers patriarchy as a political institution which depends on subordinated roles for women. She also distinguishes between 'Sex' and 'gender' as the former is rooted in biology and the latter is a fabricated and culturally acquired term.

Betty Friedan through *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) analyzes the problems and grievances of American middle class women and their entrapment within the private domestic sphere that is largely responsible for their inability to pursue public careers. According to her, patriarchy is more responsible for the oppression of women than capitalism and to do so, it uses all the trappings like monogamy, marriage, child rearing, domestication etc.

Western feminist theories though claiming to provide a multicultural or global perspective on women's issues can't be applied to other cultures as these ideas are firmly emblematic of western cultural paradigms and very often the needs and problems

of women in different cultures differ. Women writers of other cultures like India, also struggled under their own different conditions.

The idea that the women's emancipation movement in India is a western concept can be termed as facile because the preoccupations of women are not the same everywhere and the issue of women's rights is dependent on several factors associated with that country such as familial, marital, economic, social, cultural, racial and the women's own individual consciousness. Hence, the demands of women in India grew out of the reality of its own existing tradition and culture which influenced them and in which they are nurtured and conditioned.

The feminist movement started in the India in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century against the society's harsh, unjust treatment of women. The movement tried to analyze the reasons behind women's oppression and worked to achieve their liberation. So feminist thought in India grows and develops separately as a dialogical body of work if not one of a coherent framework, as gender construction and rights of women have always been discussed in India prior to the western debates on feminism but only differently.

Before independence, various women's issues like gender norms were raised by some of India's pioneering feminist literary critics in their own languages. Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910) a Marathi Hindu, through "A Comparison of Men and Women" ("Stri Purush Tulana" 1882) radically presents a critique of gender construction as a norm of patriarchy. She also exposes the exploitation of women's body by men in the Indian society. Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954), a parsi Christian and a reformist like Wollstonecraft advocated education for women in order to bring social reformation. Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932) a Bengali Muslim writer worked a lot for gender equality and other social issues related to women. She in her feministic utopia "Sultana's Dream" (1905) imagined a world where women took charge of the political sphere. Through it, she depicts a gender reversed Purdah in an alternate and futuristic world.

During the freedom struggle, (1915-1947) an independent women's movement paved the way for equal opportunities in education and status of women in Indian culture. Women faced difficult choices during the nationalist struggle as they had to involve themselves in double engagement with national identity and the woman question. Throughout the nineteenth century, the

different dimensions of women's emancipation in India were tied with the national liberation and regeneration. According to Susie Tharu:

19<sup>th</sup> century concerns with women's 'uplift' continue to underwrite govt policies and initiatives even in the nineties, these concerns include the fight against such social practices as dowry, child marriage, purdah and the prohibition of widow remarriage. They also call for an education that would enable women to perform their roles as wives, mothers and school teachers in an enlightened and socially useful mode. By the thirties, women's organisations at the national level had begun to make their presence felt not only in relation to these issues, but also politically in the demand for equal rights. (Tharu,1995:Introduction)

So with the nation achieving its own identity as a free country, the quest of women for their identity also followed.

In 1947, Leela Kasturi tried to deal with some important issues concerning women like property rights, alimony, custody rights and child maintenance. Commenting on a report on "women's role in a planned economy" she advocated how in post-colonial India, women's freedom and equality could be safeguarded in a multi-religious, multi-cultural society. Although during the 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial period, feminist writings in India were engaged in creating an Indian identity for themselves, after independence the debates on feminism shifted towards the ways in which feminist

politics were practised in the Indian patriarchal set-ups. So “the feminist critics in post colonial India” according to Jasbir Jain, “struggle against the entrenched patriarchal structures in the country which still continue to control and restrict the lives of women in one form or the other.” (Jain,2004:23-24)

Interestingly, patriarchy is a human invention, not a natural condition, which most of us have been taught, was created by men and women at a certain given point in the historical development of the human race (begins in bronze age 2<sup>nd</sup> million B.C). Consequently, this control was developed and institutionalised throughout history by using various agencies, ideologies, social practices and institutions. So that now it appears to be a natural process having achieved the complete subordination of women:

Patriarchy is the most powerful social, cultural and political institution which came into existence with the men taking over the means of production.(Rao, 1996:83)

During the post independence period, famous feminists like Gail Omvedt and Ilina Sen try to re-theorise and explore the basic cause of women’s oppression. They mainly tried to address the issues such as fair treatment of women in the work place and political rights.



In the contemporary times, Madhu Kishwar and Maitrayee Chaudhuri are at the forefront of the battle for justice and equality for women. Madhu Kishwar addresses and brings to the centre stage of political discourse, various issues and problems of women related to dowry, land-rights, co-ownership rights for women and sex-determination through her journal *Manushi*. Through her famous essay “Why I do not Call Myself a Feminist” she, despite advocating authoritarian and coercive methods which according to her destroy the sense of confidence and self-esteem, appealed to the moral conscience of people to bring social reforms for women.

So theoretical frameworks of Indian feminism have developed and transformed over time to create a space for women in response to material realities of living condition, different ideologies on gender issues, linguistic and political competencies and different events in history. Thus feminism in India has interestingly been less of an ivory tower effort and more of grass-root enterprise.

Indian literary feminism on the other hand is vital, living and as old as the literature in India itself. In Indian women’s literature throughout the ages, there are images of women that deconstruct these notions and values created by men for women like ‘chastity’,

‘motherhood’, ‘sexuality’, ‘wifely devotion’, ‘marriage’ et al and reject the supremacy of men over women:

Episodes in mythology, fables, folk stories, songs and humour (in which) women, in different ways have resisted their subordination. (Gandhi & Shah, 1992: 326-331)

Women wrote in different regional languages in India from the Vedic period to the modern era about their powerlessness and exploitation under patriarchal culture like Akkamahadevi of twelfth century wrote in Kannad , Janabai of fourteenth century in Marathi , Lal Ded of fourteenth century in Kashmiri , Mirabai, Chandrabati, and Therighata of the sixteenth century wrote respectively in Hindi, Bengali and Pali etc about their victimized condition under patriarchal norms and revolted against it. Although there has been no major social or political revolt against male domination by these women, they defied all restrictions and achieved gender equality by subverting hegemonic structures. They even challenged patriarchy and protested against it by staying outside the domain of marriage. Kalidas’ *Shakuntala* and Ilango Adigal’s *Kannagi* are other best examples in our classic literature in which women struggle for their moral rights and defeat powerful kings, although brought up and nurtured in a strict patriarchal set up and trained to a domestic

sphere where total submission and surrender is demanded from them by the male authorities.

So feminist literature in India has its roots in the Indian context itself and does not follow its western counterpart blindly for their quest for identity, but emerges from the Indian ethos itself. So it is possible for us to look beyond Marx who says that the women living in third world “cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”. (Mohanty,1991:74) as Indian women have proved it and continually represented themselves and did not need anybody else to represent them.

Though there are some issues raised by western women which were bound to be taken up by their Indian counterparts since what binds them together ultimately is also the “sociological notion of the ‘sameness’ of their oppression”. (Mohanty,1991:55) So all women do constitute a group with some common interests and desires regardless of class, culture, race etc and are indicated as powerless, suppressed and exploited by the feministic discourses in the patriarchal set-ups since patriarchy is that oppressive institution which is applied universally and cross-culturally to all women. But still, as the nature of control and subjugation of women varies from

culture to culture, the strategies will also differ, as Mohanty points out:

Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, in order both to understand it better and to effectively organise to change it. (Mohanty,1991:58)

One more significant issue raised cross culturally is the representation of women as mere sex objects in the male authored texts. Positing men as the ‘norm’ or ‘standard’ who control everything, women are projected as mere puppets in their hands, performing only such activities by which they can keep the male ‘happy’. So it becomes the inevitable task of women writers to “critique mainstream religious and cultural texts or practices and search for alternative texts or practices...” (Kumar,1989:25) in order to redefine themselves.

In Indian writing in English, we often find the recurrent image of an average Indian woman and how she leads a truncated life only due to her feminine gender depicting her condition as an ignorant, uneducated, tradition bound, family oriented and victimized being. Although the first generation Indian English writers such as Raja Rao, Rabindernath Tagore, Sri Aurbindo et al projected strong independent, full-blooded women characters but

still recreated the fundamental and archetypal image of her which is of submission and surrender.

So in its real sense, Indian literary feminism in Indian writing in English is traceable in the works of later women writers such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markhandaya et al in novel; in poetry in the works of Toru Dutt, Kamala Das et al and in drama it can be traced in the works of Manjula Padmanabhan. These women writers portray the changing position of women over the years. In their works, the age-old image of women is slowly blurring and gradually shifting towards a new image. These writers dig deep into the psyche of women, understand their feelings and tell her inner story with a deeper and truer sense of involvement. In order to express themselves in a broader perspective, they use some main strategies like rebellion, defiance, comedy, fantasy and madness. They try to analyze and redefine their roles and parameters in every social sphere.

Anita Desai, through her psychological novels, depicts the inner frustrations and sufferings of her female protagonists, their existential predicament and resistance against the so called 'normality' in a male-dominated society. Kamala Markhandeya by exploring the conflicts inside and outside the heart of her female

characters tries to find a solution at a universal level in her novels. Nayantara Sehgal advocates civil liberties for her women characters and depicts the injustice done to them in marriage. She revolts against it by choosing freedom for them. Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists, exploited under the conventional male-dominated society, create their own fate by encountering the world:

Indian writing in English reveals a chain of women lining up with each other as the country marching from tradition to modernity, .....So their themes shifts from the conventional women to that of the new women, reflecting in the process the changes that have been going on in society. (Kumar, 2006:30-31)

As a self-conscious literary project, their work often subverts patriarchal literary norms and practices. They also, in the process, rewrite male-centric canons and literary norms.

While the novel has seen some outstanding women practitioners in presenting new found, individualistic identities, poetry in English in India by women has been equally impressive in its development indicating the:

Growth of a feminist poetic consciousness that takes into account not only the traditional roles of women in being daughters, wives and mothers but also projects new interpretations of life through poetry. (Hasan,2008:329-330)

In order to understand and interpret Indian women's poetry in English, various conditions such as social, cultural and historical as well as the role of tradition has to be taken into account. In order to fully address the richness of poetry by women, we need to look at a range of poetries from myth and fairytale, folktales to nationalistic and performance poetry and the radically innovative 'Language' poetry of the present day.

Toru Dutt (1856-77) is the first woman poet of India in English. She spent her early years in France and blossomed into a characteristic Indian poet with a background of the western influences by her own wish.

Her best work has the qualities of quiet strength, of deep emotion held under artistic restraint and an acute awareness of the abiding values of Indian life. (Naik, 1992:39)

Though Toru Dutt was a Christian and was trained in western thought, she remained an Indian at heart and realised it quickly that her oriental background of literature was precious and she could blend it with her abundant European knowledge. According to James Darmesteter:

This daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted Hindu by race and tradition, and English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose writer in French, who at the age of eighteen made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three

traditions, and died at the age of twenty, in the full bloom of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel.” (Dwivedi, 1991:4)

Many Hindu ideals and legends thus find room in her poetry. Her poetic collection, *Ancient Ballads And Legends Of Hindustan* (1882) is romantic in strain and is fully loaded with Hindu thought and tradition which indicates her Sanskrit background. In it she glorifies Indian womanhood giving them names such as Sita and Savitri. She sings of Savitri’s matchless wifely devotion:

Sita, Savitri and Jagadhya Uma are the ideal representative of Indian womanhood and offer an opportunity to the poetess to reveal the mysterious feminine nature. ( Dwivedi, 1991:47 ).

In those times, the image of woman was basically drawn from the Hindu religious texts. Toru’s intimate feelings are also expressed through poems like ‘Savitri’, ‘Sita’, ‘Jagadhya Uma’ included in *Ancient Ballads*.

Toru Dutt lived in a period of Indian history when British imperialism in order to justify their stay in India, designed to prove Indians and their practices as weak, immoral and inhuman/ barbaric. Indian intellectuals of this phase, having internalised colonial discourses about the ‘native’ were only so eager to adopt the culture and ways of the imperialists. As Frantz Fanon suggests,



“these intellectuals provided proof that they had assimilated the culture of the occupying power.” (Fanon,1967:178)

Toru Dutt, being both Indian and female, was a real model of colonial literature. She has not just to match, but to outdo the British with her French knowledge. Her poem ‘Savitri’ reveals its colonial context and the British criticism of the position of women in Indian society. Toru’s main anxiety here is indeed to project Savitri as a free woman, who has a freedom to wander, to choose her friends and even to choose her husband. This was true of all Indian women in the past. Here Toru’s effort is to rebut the negative image which the British had projected and redeem the image of women. It is indicated that Savitri’s ‘virtue’ closely matches the Victorian myth of sexual purity in women which was sexual restraint and moral uprightness. Savitri is presented as the real, uncorrupted Indian woman like her white counterpart-childlike and angelic. So Toru Dutt is claiming for her Savitri the very sexual refinement, the purity which is held to be the virtue of women that the British insisted Hindu society lacked. Dwivedi has rightly said, “this prestigious child of our culture was the first major Indo-Anglian author who forcefully interpreted the soul of India to the west, and thereby acted as a bridge between the east and the west.” (Dwivedi, 1991: Preface).

It is mostly during the freedom struggle that Indian women entered the realm of public affairs, so their writings also remained under the influence of nationalism like their male counterparts, in order to strengthen the national spirit. So “during this period, they, perhaps, avoided to excoriate the ‘diseased part’ of tradition despite experiencing its burns in their daily lives.” (Yadav,2006:34) Therefore, Indian women during this period, although facing indifference and humiliation within the family and outside, failed to criticise the suppressive Indian culture only to support the nationalistic cause.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1947) in many ways belongs to the same phase in Indo-Anglian writing. She is popularly known as the ‘Nightingale of India’ as her verse echoes the lyric forms of her contemporary British poets. She was a poet, a staunch freedom fighter, a feminist and an administrator. As a poet, she mainly dealt with the fundamental aspects of human life such as life, love, death, fate, nation and the woman.

Naidu remained unmoved by the modern movement and seems more under the influence of ideal females of Indian culture, and depicts the archetypes of Indian womanhood, such as Sita and Savitri and portrays women in self-effacing and self-sacrificing roles. She presents conventional myths about women in a patriotic

manner. Yet the image of women she projects is strong and determined. She depicts the life of Indian women of different sects and does her best to arouse women out of their apathy, whether through her politically enabled position or through her poems. For instance she wrote in 'To India'

The future calls thee with a meaningful sound  
To crescent, splendours, victories vast  
Waken, o slumbering mother and be crowned,  
Who once wert express of the sovereign past.

(Naidu,2004:41)

She travelled to different cities and states in order to speak up for the rights of women. She stressed on the educational needs of women and felt drawn towards the Indian underprivileged woman, be it in her feminist speeches or poems. She was aware of the indifference which a woman met in society, and made the world realise the importance of women, as:

...therefore, I charge you....restore to your women their ancient rights, for as I have said it is we, and not you, who are the real nation builders, and without our active co-operation at all points of progress all your congress and conferences are in vain. (Naidu,1918:16)

She emerged as a woman who broke the patriarchal models of her day by her actions and living; she broke boundaries by carving out a niche for herself---both poetically and politically. Her poem, 'Pardah Nashin', a gender specific poem penetrates and unfolds the

very heart of those women who are exploited by male-dominated societies. The poem questions the veiling of women, the 'ghunghat', 'burkha' and 'chadder' which are gender-specific garments to repress a woman's identity. In it she asks mockingly,

Who shall prevent the subtle years,

Or shield a woman's eyes from tears? (Naidu,2004:37)

Naidu's poems, though British in taste, are essentially Indian in colour and tone. In the poem, 'Suttee' the widow is mourning the death of her husband. The man has been invoked as the woman's soul, and the poem highlights the terrible self-destruction the woman is ready to embrace. She asks, "Love must I dwell in the living dark?" and again 'Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead?' or 'Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone." (Tharu, 2006:254-268) Here the woman is given full autonomy, as a human soul. 'Suttee' seems the only real answer to imperialists as they had often projected the image of woman in Indian society as ignorant. Similarly in 'Dirge' we find a romantic justification of stripping the young widow of her hair and jewels. Here Naidu presents a defining moment in a Hindu widow's life and how her 'living beauty' is changed into 'living death' willingly. Naidu's burden is to justify as much as to show what makes a distortion of the landscape and its inhabitants. Although she tries to justify the

archetypal roles of women in Indian society, she still demands freedom for them as in “Village Song”, the daughter is ready to sacrifice her impending wedding which is supposed to bring happiness to her for the sake of natural freedom. She says: “bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences of sorrow” (Naidu, 2004:13). So it seems she was aware of the exploitation of women through marriage in Indian society and expresses it through her poems.

Naidu like other Indian poets of that time chose political subjects and shifts from the personal to the nationalist with ease and again shows that the liberation of India is inseparable from the liberation of its women. This new independent woman has an independent soul of her own and is the symbol of motherhood. She symbolises her nation as a mother in poems, “Awake”, “Kali”, “To India” etc and this symbolic presentation of nation- as mother has a nationalistic agenda. In these poems, the mother is clearly India who is in deep slumber and must be woken up to regain her past glory.

Young through all thy immemorial years!

Rise, mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom.

(Naidu, 1917:180)

Naidu calls upon her mother in “Awake”- who is sacred, potent and terrible for her foes- to wake up and show her children the light of freedom. She visualizes her nation as the divine mother who bestows her blessings on her children and they in turn, like true sons of a mother, pledge their loyalty towards her and liberate her through struggle.

Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, the precursors of Indian women’s poetry in English, therefore do reflect the misery and pathetic condition of women in society in their poetry but they couldn’t initiate a separate movement in women’s poetry, as was later done by Kamala Das, because they lived in times when there was not much talk of women’s liberation and feminism in India.

If Toru Dutt, in the anxiety to present a pure, uncorrupted India transforms the Indian landscape morally into a western one, and her heroines into virtuous Victorians, Naidu composed a land and a people that fits into a different, more exotic area in the western imagination....And where women were concerned, these diverse patriarchal cultures were surprisingly accommodative and reinforcing of each other. (Tharu,2006:261-262)

Their poetry didn’t reflect any conflict of gender, but was engaged in justifying women’s archetypal and self-sacrificing roles. Their poetry chose to create an image of the Indian woman who was not socially victimized, but voluntarily chose the path of suffering and death in order to save her people.

Some other women poets of note in the pre-independent period include Zebunnisa Hamidullah who published two volumes of poetry, *Indian Bouquet* (1942) and *Lotus Eaters* (1946) with themes of frustration in love and social consciousness; Sabita Devi's *Phantasies* (1943) is a collection of small lyrical poems; Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People* discusses the new identity of India and Sister Lalita's *The Star And The Plath* (1944) which has a mystical sensibility. These women poets remain engrossed in nature and spiritual concerns of their country and present it in a romantic and lyrical way.

After independence, particularly during the 1960's and after, Indian women poets in English take a sudden turn from their predecessors. With the publication of Kamala Das' *Summer In Calcutta* (1965), a new movement was inaugurated in Indian women's poetry in English.

The Poetry of 1960s breaks away from the narrative of the 'nation'. The process of liberation, urbanization and westernization created new anxieties that the women poets had to confront. The Indian women poets of the 1960s and 1970s break away from their patriarchy defined roles as dutiful daughters and mothers. (Hasan, 2008:333).

The post-independence women poets like their male-counterparts, showed a total rejection of the past and raised their

voice against social and cultural conventions. They wrote against those patriarchal, societal forces which become hurdles in the growth of their feminine sensibilities and deny/reject the traditional roles of a loyal mother, wife or daughter.

The post independent women poets are concerned with their essential feminine sensibilities and in a bold and candid manner, they articulate their protest against gender discrimination. (Singh, 2008:7)

Post-independence women poets did not indulge in exploring the relation between Beauty and truth but they are more concerned with reflecting the realities of life, which are very ugly especially for women, so the result is a poetry of protest against these ugly realities of life and not of easy acceptance like their predecessors. They did not celebrate the sacrifice of great women like Sita and Savitri which has been always glorified in Indian culture/literature. They began to deconstruct the historical myths about women and protest against their exploitation and oppression during the past. They revealed the complexities of their feminine psyche and presented the changing positions of women with the advent of modernization in Indian societies. By introducing a bold, new frankness into their poetry, they sought meaning and order in personal relationships and explored human sexuality with a confessional candour. So they are more inclined towards self-discovery, self-expression and self assertion and “explore their



collective consciousness and shared experience in order to transcend the fragmentation and isolation of their lives.” (Sharma, 2010:12-21) They have been deprived of freedom for centuries, so their concerns are more for the emancipation of women from the bonds of patriarchy.

Therefore we may begin this survey with Kamala Das (1934-2009), one of the best Indian English women poets of any time. She inaugurated a new movement in Indian English women’s poetry as she broke away from her predecessors. Her anthologies, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Play House And other Poems* (1973) are ground breaking anthologies in Indian poetry in English. She originated a vigorous and poignant feminine confessional poetry, which is “a rebellious act of self-definition....” (Kumar, 2006:24). As she says:

Wipe out the paints, unmold the clay

Let nothing remain of that yesterday. (Das,1988:104)

Kamala Das is quite distinct from earlier women poets, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and took Indian women’s poetry in English far ahead of them. She, without engaging her mind in the ideals and doctrines of ancient Hindu life, explored her inner world of failings and presented it in a true, frank and uninhibited style. She is considered as the precursor of women’s poetry in the

modern era as she presents love and sex in a bold and straightforward way. She acknowledged very boldly that “a poet’s raw material is not stone and clay, but it is her personality.” (Das,1988:14) Her poems present her sufferings due to unsatisfied emotional and sexual needs in marriage as well as outside. She often gives a free flow to her desires and feelings in her poetry.

In her poetry, she spoke fiercely and honestly about the difficulties of being a woman and wife in a society which has trained women to remain silent. She presents her experiences of life frankly and directly through her poetry. She raises her voice against the oppression of women in a male dominated culture and presents herself as a feminist in a different way. Her “poetry is one of a bold, ruthless honesty tearing passionately at conventional attitude to reveal the quintessential woman within.” (Naik, 1992:210) Thus in this desperate situation she cries:

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried  
Beneath a man? It is time again to come alive,  
The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.

(Das,1967:20)

She establishes an attitude and viewpoint which was totally unfamiliar in the Indian literary tradition. She has emerged as a

staunch rebel against conventional patriarchal structures in Indian society and expresses herself in a very bold and candid manner. Indian English poetry witnessed a perceptive change due to the writings of Kamala Das who declared, “I too call myself I”, which was a reaction to the repressive traditional society. Her poem, ‘An Introduction’ is a brilliant piece of work in which she deconstructs patriarchal constructs sanctioned by the tradition-bound Indian society. It deals very boldly with the poet’s search for her cultural, linguistic and sexual identity. The poem voices universal womanhood, which suffers and has no choice in the existing patriarchal set up. She reflects in it how patriarchy tries to fit her into a traditional mould and dictate terms to her. “Dress in saree, be girl/ Be wife they said, be embroiderer, be cook.” But she rejects all categories and goes to the extent of denying her womanliness :

I wore a shirt and/  
wore my brothers trousers, cut my hair short  
and ignored/ my womanliness.” (Das,1973:26)

She registers a protest against the suppression of women and pleads that they should be allowed to behave according to the needs of their sentiments. She complains of relationships which are nothing but sexual exploitation without love and understanding.

The poem sums up the poetry of Kamala Das and her philosophy of life as a feminist and opens new terrains for Indian women poets to express their feminine sensibilities. This poem is not only about the private life of a sensitive woman, but about all those forces of tradition, culture and society which makes her so. The poem is an attack on the institution of marriage, on marital rape, marital neglect, marital jealousy and on extra-marital sexual forays and their unseemly consequences. So in general, she attacks a whole way of life characterised by patriarchal norms which oppress and restrict women, reducing them to pathetic creatures.

As a result, her voice, according to Bruce King is more direct in Indian English poetry than any other poet's. Through her works she shatters the age-old concepts regarding women which were considered as virtues and presented them as exploitation of women in a male dominated society. Her poetry therefore becomes foundational to a feminist aesthetics in Indian English poetry. It certainly departs from the early romanticism and becomes more realistic, bold, candid and experimental.

Kamala Das was later joined by a whole generation of younger women poets in order to establish an image of women totally independent of conventional falsifying concepts, as the matter was

not of a single woman but a whole generation's pangs of birth, who now begin to confess, disclose their feelings, emotions and intimate experiences frankly and in an innovative style which was already inaugurated by her. So to achieve dignity and emancipation, women poets get together against the patriarchal tradition in order to define themselves. Although each women poet of modern India has a distinct personal voice, yet they form a collective voice when it comes to their female sensibilities in general.

So, given the monumental achievement of Kamala Das, it is pertinent to look for women's voices that possibly perpetuate the feministic tradition embodied by her.

Gauri Deshpande (1942-2003) produced three collections of poems, *Between Births* (1968), *Last Love* (1970), *Beyond The Slaughter House* (1972). Her main concerns are various aspects of love, sex and marital relationships. She is analogous to Kamala Das in her expression as well as sensibility, but she writes in a more discreet and controlled manner. She projects a "tortured woman persona" through her poetry. Love, death, loss and search, memory and nostalgia, and man-woman relationship- these are some of the key themes in Gauri's poetry. Like Kamala Das, she is bold and candid and writes in a self-conscious style. Her poetry

becomes a search for the essential woman and she begins this search from herself, which provides both sincerity and spirit to her verse.

Both Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande write mainly about love and human relationships. The themes of love and sex are so intertwined in the poetry of both of them that the one becomes the paradigm of the other.

Eunice de Souza (b.1940) is the most combative woman poet after Kamala Das. Like her, she denies her 'womanliness' and stands against patriarchal dominance. In 'Visit' she writes of how she was, 'A burly girl/ Who knocked her sissy cousins down'. (Guleria, 2007:278) She is a confessional poet and in a very bold and frank style, describes the persecution of women in a male dominated society through her famous poetry collections as *Fix* (1979) and *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988). Eunice de Souza writes:

What I am as a poet is a result of what I am in all the aspects of my life ...women's experience and socialization as a whole is different. So it is expected that what they write will be different. The battle is to validate the material lives, women's experiences, not to transcend being a woman. (Zide,1993: Introduction)

Her poetry presents women struggling for their identity in a conservative society. By breaking the age-long barriers of convention and tradition, she very boldly raises the silent voice of tormented women. She advocates the freedom of suffocated women in a male-dominated culture and exposes the male mentality as:

I have heard it said/ My parents wanted a boy/  
I've done my best to qualify. / I hid the blood stains/  
Of my clothes/ And let my breasts sag. (Iyengar,1994:727).

Through her poetry, she presents a patriarchal world which is always ready to shatter the dreams and wishes of a deserted woman. We find a protest against the eternal sacrifice demanded from a woman in her poetry, e.g. in 'The Road' she writes "They said your mother is lonely, /Nobody said, even the young must live" (Jha, 2002:121-27)

Sunita Namjoshi (b.1941) begins her career with *Poems 1967*. She give an ironic treatment to the traditional Indian notions like love, marriage, parenthood, and life in general and exposes the various idols of Indian society: "She deftly turns traditional fables upside down" (Naik:2006). Her main concerns are the condition of women, human existence and various social issues. Namjoshi celebrates lesbian eroticism in her poetic collection *Jackass and the*

*Lady* (1967) and *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988). Many of her works explore issues of gender and sexual orientation.

Sunita Jain (b.1941) resembles Kamala Das in her sudden open rupture of feeling. Although she celebrates tenderness and the joy of love, still she is aware of its disappointments and destructiveness and presents it in her poetry. She like Das, presents a poetry of protest which is highly personal. e.g. in 'Mother' she says:

I have been tied to an elephant food  
For twenty five years  
Because you said your wishes mattered  
More than my life; and the moth-eaten tradition  
Of a heartless family cried, sacrifice. (Jha, 2002:124)

Tara Patel (b.1949) deals with the single theme of love in her verse and she deals with its various facets in her single book *Single Women* (1991). Like Kamala Das, she writes very frankly and without inhibitions:

I want to touch a man Touch me, touch, touch me somewhere,  
Give me permission to touch you. (Naik, 2006:150)

What is the fate of a woman's life in a male-dominated world? How does phallocentricism inflict pain in a woman's life? She answers it through her poems e.g in "Women":

A woman's life is a reaction



To the crack of a whip  
She learns to dodge it as it whistles.

(Guleria, 2007:271-286)

In her poetry, we find a sense of exploitation at being born a woman and also a yearning for love, caring and understanding. She is tortured by the indifference of patriarchal institutions. Her poems demand attention as a woman's search for identity and space of her own.

Debjani Chatterjee, (b.1952) daughter of a diplomat, grew up in different countries and is presently living in England. Her title poem in *I Was That Woman* (1989) established her position as a committed feminist. Through it, she examines the roles of all great women, like Sita, Draupadi, Joan of Arc, starting with Eve, the first rebel and ending with the modern Typist girl.

I was that woman who roused a nation  
And was burnt so many times at so many stakes.

(Chatterjee, 1989:217-48)

Anna Sujatha Modayil (b.1934) presents through her poetry the unbearable pain experienced by women. Her poem 'Women's Loneliness' presents a women's longing for perfection, her pursuit of an ever-eluding true love, her actual drudgery, labour and search for joys of tomorrow that will ultimately end in loneliness.

We are the women who wait  
Have waited so long that our eyes  
Are weary with weeping  
And yet we wait.' (Prasad, 2008:35)

Charmayne D'Souza (b.1955) by using irony, presents vivid inner experiences and examines the man-woman relationship in *A Spelling Guide To Women* (1990):

Woo men / womb men / woe men / whim men  
Warm men / who, men? / no woman. (Papke, 2008:75)

Melanie Silgado (b.1956) examines all human relationships using irony in a blunt tone. She writes poems centring around the father-daughter relationship, e.g. her poem "For Father On The Shelf" is marked by ambivalence as the father emerges as both villain and hero of the piece. There is pride, love, apology as well as hurt, shame and rebellion.

Father, you will be proud to know/ you left something behind  
The year you died/ I inherited a mind  
Wherever you are, will you/ turn your index finger away?  
And now I'm writing with my life /  
the price of an inherited crutch. (Papke, 2008:75)

Menka Shivdasani (b.1961) presents the pathetic condition of women through her poetry; the horrors and temptations of living alone, the anxieties of a single life which gets complicated by being a woman, the sordid world of sex and broken relationships.

Her poem ‘School Girl No More’ presents the modern woman’s predicament and ‘The Game You Play’ strikes a strong note of feminism and shows how women are regarded as mere playthings in the hands of men.

Football is another world  
where men belong what the hell am I doing  
kicked around Just because I’ve got this leather hide?

(Guleria, 2007:271-286)

S Radhamani (b.1949) is another woman poet and a voice of the ‘suffering woman’ in all spheres of life. She has given vent to the rampant pain, suffering and the depravation of the basic rights of women in her poetry collection *The Times Ahead Are Propitious* (1996), *Thistle And Transformation* (1998) and *Tirings Of Transition* (2000).

Margaret Chatterjee’s (b.1925) poems are based on her personal experience and as a result the poetry is very moving and heart-felt. In her poem “15 August” the new Indian woman seeks to empower herself in the context of both patriarchy and imperialism. The female protagonist speaks:

The pageant of the past, / Pushed us and left us,  
Standing on the edge of opportunity,  
With dreams in our heart. (Sharma, 2010:12-21)

Lakshmi Kannan, (b.1947) a bilingual writer in Tamil and English gives a vivid description of various stages of women's life in a male dominated society through her poetry. Like Kamala Das she is fed up of the 'warning' voice of elders:

No no don't run/ Don't take long strides, don't raise your voice,  
Be a everyman, be moderate in everything/  
Be a model of mediocracy (Rajput: Online)

Mukta Sambrani (b.1975) through her poem "The Same" poignantly expresses how the growth of a girlchild into adulthood becomes her life's biggest tragedy as:

This is the same woman / as the girl in the picture, mister  
Only a little older/ her mother has slapped her cheeks flat  
Someone has had her dreams/ someone has had her stories.  
This is the same woman, mister, / the girl child in the picture.  
This is the same. (Naik, 2001:192)

She presents the theme of womanhood and all that it spells through her work *The Woman in this Room Isn't Lonely* (1997). She also depicts the life of urban women and their struggles in day to day life through it.

To conclude, we may say, in the modern times, poetry has evolved as an honest mirror of the tradition bound societies and literary subversions. Modern women's poetry progresses towards realism, transparency and radicalism and crosses patriarchal norms

in order to define itself. Indian women poets who wrote after Kamala Das used wider focus and greater sophistication in their verse. Within her shadow, it has proved difficult to come up with anything really new as the work of Gauri Deshpande and several other women poets-shows/illustrates. How an antithetical style might achieve results is exemplified in the very different approaches of Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker, who will be studied in detail in the followed chapters.

# Chapter II

## Revolt Against Patriarchy In Mamta Kalia's Poetry



Mamta Kalia (b.1940)

**M**amta Kalia (b.1940), a bilingual writer, writes both in Hindi and English and has published only two collections of poetry in English, *Tribute To Papa* (1970) and *Poems '78* (1979). But she has left a mark in modern Indian poetry in English. In her poetry she mainly deals with themes like love, marriage, social and family relationships and the degeneration of human values in modern society. She depicts, through her poetry, a sensitive and intellectual woman's predicament in relation to her parents, family, domestic and professional life and the large outer social life. She also articulates the psychic frustrations and compulsions of love and marriage:

Her poems deal with frustrations of a woman's life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos of values in society.  
(Bajaj,1996:19)

As an Indian woman poet, she is conscious of her identity in the traditional Indian society and raises her voice against the oppression of women with a great sense of vigour and involvement. Her poetry like Kamala Das's poetry is highly

autobiographical in content as her early life with a dominant father, a loveless relationship with her husband and his family and humiliation in her professional life develop her anger and a sense of revolt against the repressive patriarchy under which she is victimized and defeated. So her poetry accordingly depicts the agonies of women in the Indian patriarchal tradition which is largely due to subjugation and bondage under male culture. Her poetry shows a rebellious will to fight for the cause of women and demands a world free from discriminative values, hypocrisies and prejudiced rules and demands the establishment of women's identity in the contemporary world.

Mamta Kalia is no strident, feminist activist .... Yet her poetry shares a vital concern with the basic proposition of women's demands for an equitable life. She has not only the passion for individuality but also supports the feminist agenda for liberation from patriarchal oppression, and other limitations. (Vashishth, 2010: 149)

She is one of the significant poets of the new generation poets like Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Gauri Deshpande et al who "delineate the social predicament, religious barriers and its restrictions on women." (Subhashini, 2008: 85) She presents the image of conventional Indian women freely as expressed by Kamala Das and the ability to remain true in presenting reality provides originality and freshness to her poems. She revolts against



the traditions and conventions of Indian society with such fury and frankness as was never witnessed before in Indian English literature. In this connection Bruce King comments:

The present contemporary manner appears to have been initiated by Mamta Kalia who explored the themes, attitudes, voices and registers of speech which have been taken further by de Souza and Silgado. (King, 2001:155)

She depicts through her poetry the experience of a woman in different roles- as daughter, beloved, housewife, mother and as an employer etc with a colour of realism. Her poems do not only reflect her own ideas and experiences but give voice to the agony of an average Indian middle-class woman who is exploited ruthlessly by the hypocrisy of men. Kalia is very dissatisfied with the present Indian tradition, full of social and political corruption, familial disappointments and deterioration of human values which are largely responsible for the psychological and emotional crises of women. Her personality is torn between “two worlds- of tradition and modernity, freedom and bondage, domesticity and professionalism...” (Vashishth, 2010:142-57) She exposes all the discriminations against women by using a simple style and colloquial language.

As far as poetic technique is concerned, she uses irony, sarcasm, and a confessional mode to express her feelings and desires through her poetry. Her frequent use of irony makes her distinct from other women poets of her age and she uses it as a weapon to fight against the oppression of women in the Indian patriarchal society. In an interview with Tanu Gupta, she comments on her use of irony:

The only way of writing is that you wear some extra nails or extra fangs or tusks only then you can be read. Nowadays people require ampicillin for cold and cough, ginger is no longer effective. The same is the case with language. You have to evolve your own diction and language as you have to work on content. (Gupta,2010: 134)

With the help of irony, poetry becomes effective and she forcefully registers her anger, and discontent against the repressive norms of society.

Her treatment of the orthodoxy of tradition in her two poetic volumes is significant. She says herself about her poetry:

*Tribute To Papa* is an ironical collection. I tried to parody most of the relationships. I was breaking down things.....so the poems were against established values, established relationships which are taken for granted. Some of these relationships are served to you on a platter. The first book is a refusal of all that. In the second book, *Poems '78*, I've sobered down, and moved from individual to social concerns. I felt contradictions in society were more important and more critical than personal contradictions and failures. Society is still full of so

many contradictions. Women are burnt and raped. Dowry demands still exist. Instead of talking about post-modernism we should talk about post-barbarism. Much needs to be done with the pen. (Kalia,1999:60)

Her first volume *Tribute To Papa And Other Poems* (1970) is ironic in tone and autobiographical in content. Through it, she gives vent to her inner conflicts and experiences. Her title poem, “Tribute To Papa” depicts the clash between her ideas and those of her father. The father is an upholder of traditional values and wants his daughter to follow the same- but the daughter in an act of open revolt discards all the sanctities of life and is more fascinated with modern life. As she says:

Who cares for you papa?

Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?

Who wants to be an angel like you? (pg 9 TTPOP)

The daughter questions the authority and concerns of the father in her upbringing. She is in the words of Virginia Woolf, “killing the Angel in the house.” (Woolf,1929) She criticizes her father as an ‘unsuccessful man’ who could not provide her a luxurious life due to his self-righteous moral values. She challenges her father that in the modern world there is no room for his traditional values and prayers and rejects his didacticism: “I wish you had guts, papa / to smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke.” (pg 9 TTPOP)

She does not mind defying the ideals of her father in order to be happy. In the modern world, prayers are considered as concealment for inactiveness and lack of aptitude of a person. She interrogates and rejects her father's idealism and sanctimony as his inability and weakness:

When you can't think of doing anything  
You start praying,  
Spending useless hours at the temple. (pg 9 TTPOP)

She terms prayers as useless to which a person resorts when he/she is not able to do anything. Mamta Kalia in the poem represents a modern, frank, awakened woman who dares to question, judge and even revolt against her father and his values. She wants a change in the traditional values and beliefs and is bold enough to speak against the repressive patriarchal values and laws. The title of the poem is highly ironic as the poem discards the imposition of patriarchal values and ideals. Mamta Kalia seems to be frustrated and depressed at the same time dissatisfied with the given social order. So in her poems there is a cry and an inner desire to transform this society, which is denied to her, so leaves her perplexed and baffled resulted in schizophrenic behaviour in her poems. As: “‘Tribute To Papa’ is a veiled angry poem schizoid in content, a cry..... and a disowning of parentage.”

(Prasad,nd:online) So due to her schizoid (mentally abnormal) behaviour, her revolt goes to the extent of disowning her father:

These days I am seriously thinking of disowning you, papa

You and your sacredness. (pg 9 TTPOP)

These lines depict her as a serious critic of patriarchy. Because of her anti-patriarchal tone, her poetry is considered stronger than Sylvia Plath's poetry, who wrote, like Kalia, about her relationship and experiences with her father in her most confessional poem "Daddy". Plath, in order to establish an oppressor- oppressed relationship between her and her father, portrays her father as a German Nazi and herself as a Jew in the poem. Plath is at conflict with her father since for thirty years she has been abiding by the Mosaic law which is also the law of the father (patriarchy). But now she announces, "Daddy I have had to kill you."(Plath,1981:222) Both poet-daughters feel the need/necessity to exorcise the 'father' from their consciousness. Like Kalia she is ready to disown her father and is no longer that woman who lived in her father's "black shoe." Both poems "Tribute To Papa" and "Daddy" are about the struggles for autonomy and independence by the daughter-speakers.

Kalia's frankness leads to an open defiance – "everything about you clashes with merely everything about me" (pg 9 TTPOP) In

the same poem, she even does not hesitate to speak about her love affair in an unconventional way. She believes in free sex and does not care for morality:

What if my tummy starts showing gradually

And I refuse to have it curetted? (pg 9 TTPOP)

In the tradition-bound Indian society, daughters have a great 'responsibility' for honouring the family values and any wrong step by them can dishonour the whole family. In a patriarchal culture daughters are emotionally compelled to sacrifice their feelings and emotions for the sake of the family. So Kalia ends the poem with an ironic cautious note as:

But I'll be careful, papa

Or I know you'll at once think of suicide. (pg 9 TTPOP)

While Sylvia Plath in "Daddy" moves from desiring her father, fearing him to hating him and at the end is successful in ending all her relations and dealings with father, with this final retort, "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through." (Plath, 1981:223) She then becomes the author of her own destiny at last, taking over discursive control after exorcising the father figure. However, Mamta Kalia differs from Plath in this regard and at the end submits to the wishes of her father.

Kalia gives an ironic treatment to the institution of marriage which turns a young bride old before age so that she sleeps with a ‘headache’ and wakes up with a ‘backache’. The condition becomes more pathetic when the husband is not able to acknowledge her talents and even sacrifices made by her:

Love made a housewife out of me  
I came with a degree in textile designing  
I skill in debates, dramatics and games  
You don’t realise  
You don’t sympathise. (pg 20 P-78)

Sacrifice, submission and endurance are demanded from a woman in the tradition-bound Indian society, often leading a repressed and depressed condition.

After marriage, women are compelled to live a life of double-standards. Through “After Eight Years Of Marriage” Kalia writes how a woman lives a life of hypocrisy for when her parents inquire about her married life, she gives a ‘smile of great content’ as she doesn’t want to hurt her parents by narrating the miseries of living in a joint family. The poem puts it poignantly:

I want to tell them how I wept in bed all night once  
And struggled hard from hurting myself.  
That it was not easy to be happy in a family of twelve  
..... I swallowed everything

And smiled a smile of great content. (pg 26 P-78)

So like an 'obedient' and 'accommodating' Indian wife she 'swallows' everything. To ask such a question to a married woman in Indian society is absurd "I should have laughed at it", she says, because everybody witnesses the tragic predicament of women after being married. "Instead I cried/ and in between sobs, nodded yes." (pg 26 P-78) A woman's life gets complicated in a patriarchal society as she has to maintain her smile while her heart sobs.

The same thought is carried out in "Matrimonial Bliss". Kalia brings out the compulsions under which a woman is forced to spend her life, the superficiality of living with a husband with whom she has a relationship devoid of love and understanding, feeling separated while together. There is nobody to share her feelings, she feels lonely but pretends to be happy in order to please her husband.

I feel all disjoined inside,  
But the moment I hear your footsteps,  
I put all of me together  
And give you my best smile. (pg 30 TTPOP)

She is confused and depressed with regard to love and matrimony. Kalia presents how she is subjugated internally by the patriarchal society against her will and desire. So although she is in



misery and broken totally from inside, she still waits ‘anxiously’ for her husband. She is willing to suffer only to please her man. Thus she presents the predicament of a woman as, “I keep hanging on to you like an appendix/ but you, don’t mind”. (pg 30 TTPOP)

In the poem she presents a typical Indian tradition where women are forced to show concern more for their domestic bliss and completely ignore their personal problems and miseries.

According to some feminists, marriage is a social institution through which a woman is exploited physically, mentally and psychologically as it is a weapon by which patriarchy is maintained. Women are often trapped in loveless marriages. Mamta Kalia depicts the agony and misery experienced by women eternally through marriage in several of her poems, and is in open revolt against traditional marriages. “I Am A Great Fool” presents Kalia’s loss of faith in matrimonial relationships. Marriage seems to her destructive and hazardous as it snatches away love from her life.

I am a great fool  
To think that marriage is bliss  
Was it last month or last year  
That we exchanged a kiss (pg 8 P-78)

It seems that she had romantic notions about marriage as the involvement of one's whole being (head, heart, body and mind) before actually getting married. But she realises that she was living in a fool's paradise as marriage brought some ugly experiences for her. So she develops a rebellious/bitter attitude towards marriage. Another poem, "They Made Love" reflects a complete lack of feeling and emotion in marital life. There is no romantic sensation between a husband and wife but only physical consummation:

They made love / and ate sandwiches  
And looked at each other's face ---  
Two empty cans. (pg 16 P-78)

For women there is no pleasure and enjoyment even in sex. They exhibit a mechanical behaviour during love-making. Her relationship with her husband is so cold and devoid of love and understanding that in desperation she cries out:

Let's not come close during intercourse  
But mark a distance,  
Touch each other like dead-wire  
And react like fools. (pg 11 P-78)

The poem "Come" also captures the lovelessness and ennui of married life. Kamala Das also depicts the frustrations, longings and agonies of women mainly caused by the failure of the man-woman relationship. Her poems like "The Freaks" express her loveless

relationship with her husband and what keeps them together for a moment is only the “Skin’s lazy hungers”. Kalia in “I Must Write Nicely Now” expresses her anger and anguish against her arrogant and self-centred husband:

Rejection, dejection, Erection,.....

Except yourself/ You feel everything is fake. (pg 18 P-78)

She exposes the cruelty of men towards their wives also in poems like, “I’m Not Afraid Of A Naked Truth”

I’m not afraid of a naked truth

Or a naked knife or a naked drain....

In fact I am very much afraid of a naked man. (pg 9 P-78)

If there is anything in the world she fears is only the ‘man’ and his oppression of women. A woman submits herself completely to the will of man and in return he jilts her at any stage of life without any reason. So Kalia “writes in her poetry of her disaffection of males in Indian societies.” (Arana, 2008:241) Kalia also exposes unfaithfulness of a husband:

She worshipped the shivalinga all her life

and spurned her husband in bed.....

She fought against defilement at every step

And her husband eloped with her sister in march.

(pg 17 P-78)

A wife is bound to devote her life to her husband while her husband doesn't care and betrays her when she is in need of his company. So Kalia develops a loss of faith in human-relationships and expresses it in "It was Faith":

It was faith / that I had in you

It is faith / that I have in no one now. (pg 9 P-78)

Mamta Kalia's "Dubious Lovers" further shatters romantic notions of love. Her views are that traditional Indian marriages lead to the death of love as the routine course of domesticity and household engagements doesn't provide time for love and romance. So at times while she longs for the company of her husband, they are ultimately puzzled over what to talk about as:

We look at each other sheepishly

badly needing something to talk about. (pg 19 TTPOP)

In Indian societies, married life has nothing to offer but boredom, anxieties and only responsibilities and duties. Kamala Das also through her poetry presents a tortured woman who pleads for understanding and compassion from her husband. So there is Mamta Kalia, too, in frustration grilling her husband:

you insist on your presence/ and I am conscious of it/

as I am of a burning in my rectum/ or of a hair on my chin.

(pg 19 TTPOP)

Like Das, she is blunt and doesn't hesitate to use corporal images such as "burning in my rectum", "hair on my chin", and "I open my mouth".

Instead of Love and understanding between husband and wife there is only compromise and adjustment. Kalia mentions some frequent unavoidable quarrels in Indian marriages as:

Every time I open my mouth  
You feel let down,  
And every time you discuss your pay scale,  
I try hard not to frown  
If this goes on where will we end?  
Or have we ended before we have begun? (pg 19 TTPOP)

The drudgery of day-to-day household chores imposed on women takes away love from married life. She indicates through "I Feel Like Crying All The Time" that marriage is no more a sweet relationship but a trap full of endless pain for a woman.

I feel like crying all the time  
.....  
I hate these people around  
Related to me  
Just because they were born  
To my husband's mother's brother's daughter.  
(pg 19 p-78)

The poem analyses the disgust brought out by marriages in Indian societies where marriage does not involve developing a love-relation with one's husband but marrying as if with the whole family and everyone related to the husband. In a joint family, a daughter-in-law is supposed to sacrifice her own wishes and dreams for the sake of her family. She has to shrink her own self in order to make her family happy. She is expected to obey everybody at her in-laws. In the poem, there is a revolt against such conventional relations and a cry for independence.

I want to smash a glass early in the morning  
and wake up everybody with a start" (pg 19 P-78)

She is bored by these love-less relationships and is disgusted by people around her; even by her husband who, she says: "scowls at/ every word I speak." (pg 19 p-78)

In another poem "Love Made A Housewife Out Of Me" the poet feels depressed by the every-day household chores which are a threat to the freedom and individuality of a woman. Kalia captures the destructive influence of household drudgery on one's life and even on her artistic creativity as she herself confesses:

I like to write at a time when my feelings are at my fingertips, but all my routine job takes away the fire." (Kalia,1999:64)

So the poem presents a view which could be termed as  
'oppression by domestication' as:

Unmade beds, dirty linen  
Papers long folded, slippers thrown,  
.....  
A sinkful of plates  
And a head full of ache. (pg 20 P-78)

The same thought is expressed by Kamala Das in "An Introduction", which reveals the demands made by patriarchal society from her as, "dress in saree, be girl, / Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, / be a quarreller with servants. Fit in..." (Das, 1973:26) Domestication is regarded as the best way to keep a woman subordinate and subservient to men. So both the poets raise their voice against this social menace in an ironic tone.

The loss of one's identity is often another form of estrangement that a woman feels under a repressive patriarchal system. Kalia highlights this problem through a number of poems. She gives vent to her identity crises in "Anonymous":

I no longer feel I am Mamta Kalia  
I'm Kamala / or Vimla / or Kanta or Shanta  
(Kalia, 1997:26)

She criticises the roles of traditional housewives as they lose their identity after turning into traditional house-wives and are reduced to mere house-maids who have nothing to do but:

I cook, I wash / I bear, I rear / I nag, I wag /

I sulk, I sag /and feel happy”. (Kalia,1997:26)

Kamala Das also gives vent to her identity crises through her poems like, “I Shall Some Day”. But the crises she feels are mainly due to her loss of faith in her relation with husband as she says:

I shall some day, leave the cocoon

You built around me with morning tea,

Love-words flung from doorways and of course

Your tired lust. ( Das,1973:48)

Kalia is dissatisfied with her life and expresses her anger at the loss of her individuality and identity. As a woman, she faces discrimination, obstacles and humiliation in every sphere of her life, despite having a good education. She reflects:

Instead of fighting, I start writing. People around you always try to fit you into a frame – parents, peers and partners.....I snapped myself into two bits like a pod. One bit was obeying, towing and rowing; the other raised its head well past midnight and scribbled away in dairies, on the back of envelopes, on office file covers. (Kalia, 1999:58-59)

This is the condition of every average Indian housewife. So Kalia represents the collective women and gives voice to their feelings in general. In “Tribute To Papa” Kalia creates her own



identity by rejecting her father's notion of "greatness" and "Indian womanhood" who are ready to die for the sake of their sons as:

You want me to be like you, papa  
Or like Rani Lakshmibai  
You're not sure what greatness is  
But you want me to be great. (pg 9 TTPOP)

Her poem "Inside Out" depicts the contradictions of a female soul in the Indian culture, where a woman, in order to assert an identity is changed into several roles:

I feel / some parts of me are gathering fire  
And some parts, ice/ A part of me is a jackal  
A part of me is an ass / A part of me is a swan.  
(Pg 13 TTPOP)

Most poets use imagery of different natural objects such as animals, birds, flowers, rivers etc as it creates a magic effect in the poem when comprehended. It is used more symbolically, so that a poem extends beyond its literal meaning and becomes more semantic and connotative. Kalia also uses animal imagery in order to reveal her nature and character. At times her behaviour is very cordial and gentle like a dove but at other situations she has to behave very cunningly like a Jackal and sometimes as if very foolish like an ass. She has so many contradictory roles to play that

her real-self is lost. There is no constant identity for her but she feels a permanent identity crisis.

A woman is not spared even in her professional career and is exhausted and humiliated especially working under males. Kalia reflects the frustrations and dilemmas of the educated-urban working women through her poems. In the poem “How Like A Fool” Kalia depicts how a woman has to make compromises and adjustments in a male-dominated culture between the tedium of household and work-place.

How like a fool I have been working all along  
When work is work's own defeat  
My promotion waits on your naughty knees  
Readiness is all I now need. (pg 15 p-78)

In the above poem, a sense of humiliation and exploitation is indicated. Kalia also exposes the sexual exploitation women experience under a male boss. According to Simon De Beauvoir:

A woman is not allowed to do something positive in her work and in consequence win recognition as a complete person. However respected she may be she is subordinate, secondary and parasitic. (De Beauvoir, 1984: 475)

The same idea is put forth in “Tit For Tat” where Kalia depicts the obedience and subordination to a male boss. But this subordination enrages her and she expresses her anger thus:

I'll hit you! / I'll tear you up

.....

No, I won't kill you all at once

You don't kill me that way either. (pg 16 TTPOP)

Kalia's woman wants to avenge her male boss for his misdeeds.

She breaks the age-old silence imposed by patriarchy:

Let you taste the whole of death gradually,

As I tasted it for twenty three years.

You made me kneel / For insignificant things;

.....

You made a cipher out of me (pg 16 TTPOP)

But she is forced to make compromises with the patriarchal laws in her professional career. Kalia says:

But I didn't / instead, I whispered, "thank you, sir"

And came out. (pg 16 TTPOP)

She is not dumb but challenges her boss to meet her outside the safe custody of office so that, "we'll have it all evened up". According to Patnaik:

Kalia's poetic persona represents the quintessential woman in her manifold aspects, rebelling against what is, with an underlying reminder of what should be true of humanity. In her poetry, there is an unceasing content of restlessness. (Patnaik 2009:online)

During the 1970's, some feminists like Betty Friedan demanded liberation from entrapment within the domestic sphere as it becomes a hurdle in their pursuing of public careers. Mamta Kalia

also considers the role of housewife and a mother devoting all her time to raising children and serving her man as a major obstacle in the development of her career. So through “No I’m No Pelican To My Sons” Kalia denies the sacrificial role bestowed on a woman and does not show any, “confirmative attitude to patriarchal powers.” (Bhattacharya,1991:161). The poem is about the attitude of women like Kalia towards their relation and how women criticize and acknowledge their bond with their children and husband. In a traditional Indian society, the role of a woman is never counted. She is always expected to be submissive, humble and docile and is always crushed between household responsibilities and duties towards different family members. So a woman lives in the “concentration camp” as Betty Friedan famously called. But Kalia revolts against it:

No, / I’m no pelican to my sons

Nor a dove to my love. (pg 8 P-78)

Here, the Pelican symbolises self-sacrifice and the dove tenderness. So she is not going to play a sacrificial role for her sons or husband; she is not a pelican who will feed her off-springs on her blood and be happy to be, “An antibiotic against all infections” and “a shot in the arm of the family.” (Pg 8, p-78) She doesn’t feel proud of her creativity for producing sons but considers it one of

the painful activities in a woman's life. As opposed to it Helene Cixous narrated in *Coming to Writing*:

Writing as if I had the urge to go on enjoying, to feel, to push, to feel the force of my muscles, and my harmony, to be pregnant and at the same time to give myself the joys of parturition, the joys of both the mother and the child. To give birth to myself and to nurse myself. Life summons life. Pleasure seeks renewal. (Tendon, 2008:89)

As compared with Mamta Kalia, Sylvia Plath also gives importance to things she created including her children as she says, "I will write until I begin to speak my deep self, and then have children, and speak still deeper." (Plath,1982:166) and also "I must first conquer my writing and experience and then will deserve to conquer childbirth." (Plath,1982:240) Unlike Kalia, child birth is not a painful activity of a woman's life to Plath, but an enriching force and a gift from nature.

Kalia also depicts the harsh realities of contemporary Indian society and mocks them in several of her poems:

She has dared to speak out the minds and pronouncing the anxieties, agonies and angers in high brazen tones about her in reference to Indian women. (Vashishth,2010:143)

In the poem, "Sheer Good Luck" she uses a direct and sarcastic tone to criticize social norms. She presents the silent sufferings of women in a male-dominated Indian society in which a woman is

not secure and is always in a state of threat and any accident is possible to her in this situation:

So many things/ could have happened to me  
I could have been kidnapped/ at the age of seven  
And ravaged by/ dirty minded middle-aged men.  
I could have been married off/ to a man with a bad  
smell.....  
I could have been/ an illiterate woman  
Putting thumb-prints. (pg 11 TTPOP)

In a single poem, she turns our attention to so many social issues and crimes against women like kidnapping, rape, early marriages, illiteracy and domestic violations. At the end, she adds an ironic remark:

But nothing ever happened to me  
Except two children  
And two miscarriages. (pg 11 TTPOP)

She exposes the exploitation of women both mentally and physically by men. She has been accredited for initiating a wave of women's vernacular poetry with its "stripped down style, street language and forcefulness." (King,2001:155)

The same thought is captured in "Against Robert Frost" which is a short, ironic and witty poem written against Robert Frost's, "After Apple Picking" in which Frost enjoys the event of apple

picking whereas Kalia brings out the pathetic condition of women in Indian culture who could not afford an apple:

Whatever we save we keep for beer  
And contraceptives. (pg 21 TTPOP)

The poem thus captures the hard and unromantic lives of women and their everyday problems in the middle class urban Indian societies. To be born as a female is itself considered a shame and a sin in Indian society and it brings no happiness for the parents. Kalia reflects this situation in “Brat”:

Looking at my navel / I’m reminded of you,  
Mamma You, perhaps, were hardly proud  
Of your creativity..... (pg 20 TTPOP)

The mother is not happy that she has given birth to a female child and is sure to be condemned for it and if the child would not have looked like the father, several fingers would have been pointed at her and she would have faced the wrath of both family and society. So the only sigh of relief for the mother is that:

I looked like papa/ and not like the neighbour /  
who shared our bathroom”. (pg 20 TTPOP)

This is an ironic note made at the end. Another poem, “Self-Pity’ depicts the pathetic condition of women in Indian culture where nobody seems to care for them when in need. A pitiable

image is evoked where nobody comes forward to help a miserable woman.

Who will come and ask,

“Are you tired? Are you hungry?”

-----

In this large unfriendly town

Who will say, “Don’t Cry” (pg 31 TTPOP)

Virginia Woolf narrates in *A Room Of One’s own*, “A woman is of highest importance imaginatively; however, she is completely insignificant practically.” Indian culture is similar where everybody ignores a helpless and needy woman, although woman is worshipped in the form of Kali, Durga, Sita etc.

Like Kamala Das, Kalia expresses her desire to defy the social restrictions imposed on her. In “Compulsions” she revolts against social norms and “probes into the desire to seek the depth of the real” (Shahane,1971:738) which is denied to her in a patriarchal society. Her resentment against patriarchal society is so strong and forceful that in rebellion, she goes to the extent of shedding her womanliness and declares:

I want to pick my nose

In a public place

I want to sit in my office chair

With my feet up. (Pg 12 TTPOP)



While Kamala Das desires to live in non-domestic ways and expose the social and cultural constructions of ideas about femininity in “An Introduction” and gets offended at taking orders of her family and in revolt sheds off her female qualities by wearing a ‘shirt’ and her ‘brother’s trousers’ and cut her hair like men, Kalia expresses the limitations put forth on women by ‘categorizers’ of the male society and so wants to cross those limitations. She rejects all standards set by the patriarchal society and wants to reveal her own self and identity with a sense of freedom.

I want to pay Sunday visits

Totally undressed.....

I want to reveal/ my real age. (pg 12 TTPOP)

This reaction is not an impulsive one but a natural revolt against age-old repressive norms of society put forth by men. Restrictions are imposed on women and they are not allowed to live their lives according to their own wishes and needs in patriarchal societies. So the poet has a rebellious desire for natural life.

When Kalia finds no other means to fight against the oppressions of men, she moves towards writing. She finds writing a medium for her emancipation and tries to get rid of her inner

conflicts through it. She expresses her feelings in, “In My Hour Of Discontent”:

In my hour of discontent / I neither shout nor rant  
I simply fill ink in my pen / And spill it with intent.

(Pg 17 P-78)

But she has to be very cautious and self-restrained while writing or she will be dealt with severe punishment by patriarchal society. The irony is expressed by Kalia in following lines:

Using my pen like sword  
Creating at best only verbal discord. (Pg 17 P-78)

Mamta Kalia expressed in a personal interview:

Creative expression is a lone man's battle against the enormous uncertainty of this universe. ....I may not be able to transform the world but I can certainly make them see through my minus-three eye sight..... the hope of being heard and read always exists. (Kalia,1999:63-64)

So she retains the hope that through her writing she may change the traditional ideology against women constructed by patriarchal forces so that this place will become a better place for women. So to conclude with her poem “I write”:

I write  
Because I cannot bite.  
It's the way  
The weak ones fight. (pg 15 P-78)

# Chapter III

## **Dharker's Rebellion Against Religious Laws**



**Imtiaz Dharker (b.1954)**

**I**mtiaz Dharker, (b.1954) a poet, artist and documentary film maker, describes herself as a “Scottish Muslim Calvinist” as she was born in Pakistan, brought up in Glasgow, Scotland and moved to India after her marriage with an Indian, Anil Dharker. After the death of her first husband she moved to London and married to a Welshman, Simon Powell, who was the founder of “Poetry Live”, an organisation which encourages young people from all over the world to read and write poetry. It is this varied cultural experience that characterises her poetry and drawings. Accompanied by drawings, she has published five books of poetry, *Purdah And Other Poems* (1989), *Post Cards From God* (1997), *I Speak For The Devil* (2001), *The Terrorist At My Table* (2009), and *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009) in which she mainly deals with themes like home, freedom, journeys, communal conflict and gender politics.

Dharker's all poetic works has a strong characteristic feature of 'Transmediality' which is a new trend in the German literary studies and in which there is combination of different media or art forms or a 'mere overlap of forms of medial representation and in the process there is 'transgression' of boundaries between participating media.

If a work of art consists of different media that interact in a transmedial way, the boundaries between these media do not remain intact but are transgressed in such a way that the media involved cannot be examined separately in an analysis of this work of art. (Lehmann 2012 Online)

Dharker's works are illustrated by her own drawings/visual art. Thus there is a transmedial exchange between these two art forms which influence each other. In an interview with Jerry Pinto she admits:

'Sometimes a poem can start with an idea and that can in turn spark off a drawing.' For years, she says, she kept her engagements with these two arts apart. Now they have fallen into each other. Poet and art critic Ranjit Hoskote has called them 'poems amplified by drawings' to which Imtiaz only wants to add, 'drawings amplified by poems'. (Pinto, 2004 Online)

Thus in case of Dharker we can only understand the complex ideas/meaning attached to her poems if we approach her work transmedially, since there is strong connection between her poems and drawings.

She proves herself as a staunch feministic voice when she revolts against an organized Islamic culture and criticises its laws which imprison a woman in the four walls of the home. She mocks the roles through which women are made subordinate as well as their condition which is not satisfactory in a conservative Muslim culture. In this sense, she is a pioneer as she is the only noted Muslim woman poet writing in English with a traditional Muslim upbringing who presents her various experiences as an intelligent and sensitive Muslim woman through her poetry.

She raises her voice against the orthodox ways in which Islam is interpreted and followed. She proved herself a rebel, be it in her personal life, against religion or social and political values. Born and brought up in a traditional Muslim family, she protests against the rigid principles of Islam which are used to restrict a woman's life. By marrying a non-Muslim, she violated one of the basic tenets of Islam and revealed herself an independent person. Her rebellion particularly against the position and treatment of women in Muslim society is evident in her poetry which functions as a slap in the face of religious orthodoxy. She combines her artistic gifts with her personal experiences and presents a realistic image of the orthodox ways of Islamic tradition which is followed blindly. So

her poetry is full of political and religious purpose and she projects it by a strong use of imagery and metaphors.

She belongs to that category of feminist women poets, like Gauri Deshpande, Eunice-de-Souza, Fahmida Riyaz and Kishwer Naheed (Urdu feminist poets) et al, who raise their voice against an increasingly hostile and male-dominated social and cultural context. Bruce King has rightly introduced her as:

Someone as distinct in her own way as Mamta Kalia, Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza.....consciously feminist, consciously political, consciously that of a multiple outsider, someone who knows her own mind rather than someone full of doubt and liberal ironies. (King, 2001:321).

Her poetry deals with the major cultural values of her religion and forcefully expresses her concern for humanistic and feministic values. Her poetry is not only confined to women's issues but is a fierce critique of the state's repressive political, social and cultural milieu. She highlights various issues and problems of women by employing a lot of irony, images and metaphors in her poetry. Dharker's poetry shows her interest in women's health, their social condition and education. She reflects on the condition of women in contemporary world:

Women are racing ahead in all kinds of fields: .....And yet there are women Who don't even know they have Choices.....The cases are in

our newspapers. Every-day, a young girl abused within their own families.....I do see all the bright young girls and the self-confident women around me..... Ofcourse, they are shining..... and what I am saying is that I want all the others to shine too, to have the same opportunities. (Dharker, Women Shining : Online)

She knows that the condition of women nowadays has changed a lot, but what she wants is to work for the upliftment of those who still constitute the major part and are still suffering.

She began her poetic career with *Purdah And Other Poems* (1989) which establishes her reputation as a staunch feministic voice in Indian English poetry. Although a precise collection of 25 poems, the book exposes the several levels of oppression against the women which are presented through the eyes of a sensitive Muslim woman through her experiences:

The poems in my new book, *Purdah* started with almost seductive image of the veil and then began to suggest the complex ideas associated with it. (Dharker, sheer poetry Online)

Through the first poem, “Purdah-1” in the collection she speaks against the institution of the veil which is used as a weapon in structured Islamic culture to subjugate a woman. The poem deals with the turning point in the life of a Muslim girl when she experiences injustice, oppression and violence through the culture of ‘purdah’. She finds different meanings in the word ‘Purdah’ at



different times. It is “a symbol of moral, religious and social taboo.” (Chaudhury, 2006:173-74) Dharker objects to the veil as she considers it more mental than physical. Of course the veil or purdah secures her physical body and provides her safety from prying eyes. It is “A kind of safety/ the body finds a place to hide.”(Pg 3 PAOP) But it also has a lot of negative effects. She is treated as all ‘body’ that needs a covering; her existence on this earth is considered as a symbol of lust and nothing else.

Here is a meditation about the imposition of the veil on a young woman and her consequent loss of contact with the world. (Hughes, 2006 Online)

Dharker revolts against the Veil as according to her, it limits the opportunities to seek learning and enlightenment leading to the death of intellect just as earth covers the dead person-keeping them unaware of the experiences of the world:

The cloth fans out against the skin

Much like the earth that falls

On coffins after they put the dead men in. (Pg 3 PAOP)

Purdah is considered here as coffin for women who are given a burial treatment while alive. She is annoyed with the system as it snatches from a woman her identity and treats her very harshly. Purdah doesn't allow a woman to exercise her freedom as an individual and restricts her vision of the outside world as the

experiences which are available to others but not to her as nobody recognizes her under the veil.

The girl experiences very strange feelings under purdah. Even the people she has known from her childhood become strangers for her and she for them. She is looked at by everybody as if she is a piece of wonder.

People she has known

Stand up, sit down as they have always done.

But they make different angles. (Pg 3 PAOP)

So Dharker's focus is on the deadening aspects of the purdah system which becomes a barrier between a woman and the rest of the world. Commenting on her first book, Arundhati Subramaniam says:

Dharker's first book, explored a somewhat interior politics by probing the multiple resonance of the veil. The result was a work rich in layer and obliquity.....(Subramaniam 2007 Online)

She starts the book by a revolt against the Purdah system but as she proceeds, she exposes the multiple meanings associated with purdah which is used to restrict a woman's life. She is forced to obey the norms prescribed by the male-oriented culture. Her adulthood must be accompanied by modesty and reticence:

She was old enough to learn some shame

She found it came quite naturally. (Pg 3 PAOP)

The above lines are a deliberate attempt of Dharker to make them ambiguous and ironic as:

the situation which girls face in the world may be different. It implies that when the world (especially the male gaze) starts seeing her as an object, the girl ought to respond by taking recourse to Purdah....since the girl is seen by the world as a woman. (Sawian, 2010 Online)

Purdah remains no longer physical covering but has become a social prerequisite to cultivate modesty in women. When Dharker was asked in an interview about the most powerful words anyone has spoken to her, her reply was “Now you’re old enough to learn some shame.” (What Are They Whispering, online) The sense of sin and shame is hammered into every Muslim woman’s mind from an early age. It is purdah which makes a woman believe that she is a sexual organ and should not tempt men in anyway:

Carefully carrying what we do not own

Between the thighs a sense of sin. (Pg 3 PAOP)

They have been taught to be ‘ashamed’ of their bodies. As a female, she has no choice but to accept it as sin. “The body-culture and its degrading fleshy enterprise, inflicts a guilty conscious.” (Pandey, 1999:47-58) So the poem presents how people’s ideas about females become part of their identity and soon they begin to see their lives and the outside world through these internalised

ideas. As a result, she is detached from her real self and “She stands outside herself” (pg 4 PAOP) as Dharker says:

The girl is able to distance her personality from her physical state and consider herself as a subject, in doing so, she realizes how heavily dependent she is on the patriarchal structures, that govern social norms and conventions.....thus, she is constantly engaged in the situation and the world around her.” (Sawian, 2010 Online)

At every stage of their lives, women are made dependent on males, childhood is bonded to the father, adolescence is spent under the brother’s control, youth in the service of the husband and old age on the servitude of her sons. Dharker admits that “In Pakistan, I was always someone’s sister or someone’s daughter asking permissions to do things. It’s terrible to be dependent for approval on a male member of the family.” (Dharker, 1999:113) So she becomes a weak victim of oppressive structures and is forced to depend on men to save and protect her and rescue her from her plight.

Passing constantly out of her own hands  
Into the corner of someone else’s eyes  
While doors keep opening  
Inward and again / Inward. (Pg 4 PAOP)

Dharker says:

I see a woman going deeper and deeper into herself, because the route outwards is barred to her. She is disappearing. I want her to come back and be seen. (Hughes, 2006 :Online)

Purdah is designed by a patriarchal society to suppress women so that they do not demand their independence and in a way keep up the superiority of men. So Dharker is pained that due to the hypocrisy of religious and political leaders, ideals and values are not sought genuinely.

It is very interesting to note that the purdah system faces challenges world-wide and even from male writers like Israr-ul-haq Majaz (1911-1950), a Pakistani Urdu poet, who raises his voice against the Purdah system in the poem “The Veil And Honour” (Purdah aur Ismat) as:

It would be better if you shrugged off this wicked veil....  
This scarf that covers you is beautiful indeed  
It would be better if you converted it into a banner of revolt.

(Ahmad, 1991:23)

In contemporary times, purdah system is so much in question that some countries like Malaysia, France condemned full purdah and even a woman is dismissed from many govt and private jobs and even from universities for extensive covering. But there are still women who veil willingly and define it as a sign of religious readiness and an indication of personal religious commitment. They reject the western idea that purdah is a burden upon them and brings them disgrace. They took veiling as a protection when they enter the public sphere. Women like 33 years old Yemen's,

Tawakkul Karman, Nobel peace prize winner (2011) when told by journalists that her hijab is not proportionate with her level of 'intellect' and 'education' replied:

Man in early times was almost naked and as his intellect evolves he started wearing clothes. What I am today and what I am wearing represents the highest level of thought and civilization that man has acquired and is not regressive. It is the removal of clothes again that is a regression back to the ancient times. (The Muslim times, 2012 Online)

Many young women adopt the veil as a retort to extreme westernization and protest against the western feminism's devaluation of her, so proudly throw their image of the 'colonised oriental women' in the face of western women's caricature of her. They reject the western notions of purdah and mock their hypocrisy:

When western women were civilized 'victorians' because they covered up, exposure was deemed barbaric. Today, the covered veiled woman has replaced the exposed woman as the signifier of the 'other' indicating western woman's superiority. (Bulbeck,1998:30)

Our women were considered as barbaric by the west during the past as they didn't cover like 'Victorian modest women' and today when the west have changed their ideology, they interpret the east through their own theories which is totally unacceptable to their

eastern counterparts. So through purdah they offer a culture that functions as an alternative to permissiveness or licentiousness.

Sylvia Plath has also written a poem on the same title “Purdah” but it has more metaphoric connotations than literal as:

My visibilities hide/ I gleam like a mirror.  
At this facet the bridegroom arrives/ Lord of mirrors!  
It is himself he guides/ .....  
I am his/ Even in his/ absence,  
I revolve in my sheath of impossible.

(Plath,1981:242-43)

Although she also depicts social injustice and how social norms weigh heavy on a woman’s psyche, her Purdah is more between a husband and wife and the latter is afraid of him even in his absence and always tries to hide herself in his shadow, whereas Dharker’s woman exhibits a purdah which is between her inner-self and her outer-world. Still both Dharker and Plath explore womanhood under Purdah as a “veiled ontology (or theory of existence) suggesting as in ‘Purdah-I’, ‘subtle and shifting psychological states of being.’” (Arana,2008:138-39) As ‘Purdah’ whether literal or metaphorical, weighs heavy on a woman’s soul.

According to Dharker, the fate of a girl child in a conservative Islamic society is sealed from her very birth and with age it gets

worse. Girls are forced to go through traditional, arranged marriages. They don't have any choice of their own but to accept whatever will be chosen for them. Throughout their life, they have been taught to cover "their brightness tightly round". These harsh practices of Islamic culture against woman are exposed / highlighted in "Purdah-II" through two women- Saleema and Naseem. The poet refers to the story of Saleema, who is forced to marry within her community, although she is in love with an English man but her religion doesn't allow her to marry outside her community, so she becomes a machine- a child-producer as her religion prohibits the use of contraceptives.

Had annual babies, then rebelled at last.

At last a sigh, behind the veil, /of life;

Found another man, became another wife. (pg 9 PAOP)

In desperation, she takes a divorce and elopes with her lover hoping that her predicament may change but, to no avail as her condition doesn't change:

Her neck is bowed as if she were a hood.

. . . . . watching, as any creature

that lifts its head and sniffs the air

only to scent its own small trail of blood. (pg 10 PAOP)

She feels guilty for her revolt and marrying again as her condition is the same after her second marriage: disgust, pain,



bondage and no freedom. She learns that a 'man is man' no matter which community he belongs.

Naseem's condition is the same, who elopes with an English man, and is consequently excommunicated as her act brings shame for her family.

the table is laden at Moharram  
and you are remembered.  
among the dead. No going back  
The prayers said. ( pg 10 PAOP)

In an orthodox established Muslim culture, women are dealt with severe punishments for their 'loose morality'. All the women in "Purdah-II" by breaking religious rules face the wrath of their community. They are punished physically, socially, culturally and psychologically. So the poem mocks the ways in which society restricts the freedom, dignity and choice of women. According to Patke:

"Purdah-I" offers deeply felt evocations of the experience of growing up as a woman in an Islamic society while as "Purdah-II" elaborates on how the symbolic veil divides and suppresses" (Patke,2003:270-71)

In several of her poems, Dharker highlights the crime of sexual exploitation against women through the institution of marriage that often begins at a very young age in Muslim culture:

They have all been sold and brought,  
The girls I knew,  
Unwilling virgins who had been taught,  
Especially in this strangers' land, to bind  
Their brightness tightly round. (Pg. 7 PAOP)

Islamic laws, which guide a man's life in Muslim culture, allow a man to marry more than one woman at a time and he is free to divorce a woman at any time. He also enjoys an unquestioned authority over his wife in all matters. So according to poet, women are treated as slaves or commodities and brought and sold against "Meher" assured to them in each marriage as after divorce she is again forced to marry another man. She loses her youth and womanhood in this process of marrying again and again.

There is no love and mutual understanding between a wife and husband in forced traditional marriages but only lust. Dharker protests the ways in which a woman's choice is restricted and she is not allowed to marry according to her choice but to accept and marry the man chosen by her parents. As a result she surrenders her happiness gladly and feels a sense of pride in it, so they indulge in each other's passionate delights without love.

Night after virtuous night.  
you performed for them.  
they warmed your bed. (Pg 7 PAOP)

The same situation is depicted in “Battle-Line” where man and woman are in conflict creating boundary lines with check points and then by their will destroy the same. Dharker questions- “Did you expect dignity?” The nations, lovers, husband and wife-behave similarly after they draw battle-lines:

Distrustful lovers / Who have fought bitterly  
And turned their backs; /But in sleep, drifting slowly...  
Forgetful of hostilities / Until, in the quiet dawn,  
The next attack. (Pg 47 PAOP)

There is no love and understanding in their relation but only ‘Skin’s lazy hungers’ as Kamala Das termed it who also depicts the plight of women who become victim to the lust of men in poems like, “The Sunshine Cat” “The Looking Glass” et al in which she exposes the sexual exploitation of women and presents men as indifferent and lustful. Likewise, Dharker presents the sexual exploitation of a woman under Muslim tradition in which she is forced to spend her whole life with a man she doesn’t love. . In “A Woman’s Place” she says:

Our distance is elastic, It grows  
.....  
Reminding us how close we are. (pg 34 PAOP)

Islamic laws restricts women’s role in society to the domestic sphere, which Dharker objects through her poems. She presents

how women lose their own identity through marriage and adulthood. In the daily course of work like day-to-day shopping, cooking, facing the hostility of mother-in-law, waiting for the husband and being alone, she is entirely changed into another woman during the course of years. “Another Woman” depicts:

This morning she brought green ‘methi’  
In the market, choosing the freshest bunch;.....  
Come home, faced her mother-in-law’s  
Dark looks, took / the leaves and chopped them.

(Pg.38-39 PAOP)

Society, religion and culture left her with no other options, so  
“It was the only choice she has ever known”:

This was the house she has been sent to,  
The man she has been bound to,  
The future she has been born into. (Pg 39 PAOP)

Kamala Das presents the same idea through her poems, like  
“The Old Playhouse” in which she criticises marriage by bringing  
out the living reality of life after marriage:

you were pleased.....  
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and  
to offer at the right moment the vitamins.....  
I lost my will and reason, to all your  
questions I mumbled incoherent replies.... (Das,1973:01)

Marriage and adulthood for women imply a relative loss of self as she is subjugated by the strong weapon of patriarchy- that is “domestication” which both Das and Dharker protest.

Dharker argues through her poetry, that sometimes it is our family that becomes a cause for oppression and suffering- often the result of masculine domination and destruction. Mothers who lack their own rights have little protection to offer their daughters from male relatives and other authoritative figures. So, mothers often mould their daughters in their own roles in patriarchal cultures. In “Choice”, Dharker depicts how at first the daughter wants to escape the fate of her mother but in course of time she learns the ways and attitudes of her own mother and follows her. Dharker concludes:

Mother, I find you staring back at me.

When did my body agree

To wear your face? (Pg 42 PAOP)

It is clearly indicated that in patriarchal Islamic society, one woman is used to condition another woman. So in “The Hunted House” Dharker advises:

Kick the can! Kick the can

Run! But don't go near

the hunted house. ....

there are dead women's fingers squirming.

(Pg 21 PAOP)

Dharker mocks those religious norms which restrict a woman's life and her freedom. According to her, in Islamic culture, everything is prescribed for a woman, what to do and what not to do. She is not even allowed to smile freely:

Mouths must be watched, especially

If you are a woman. A smile

should be stifled with your sari-end.

.....

if you need to scream, do it

Alone but in front of a mirror. (Pg 32 PAOP)

It is ironic that she is not allowed to reveal her happiness or pain. "A plastic religion, a farce created by a patriarchal system, under the weight of which woman is cracking, seems to be Imtiaz's message." (Baskaran, 2008:31) In "The Child Sings" Dharker observes:

She is nothing, but a crack

Where the light forgot to shine. (pg 31 PAOP)

She is not even in control of her life and has restrictions imposed upon her in every sphere of her life. She is strictly ordered that:

whatever they might wear/ In the purdah of the mind....

They veiled their eyes/ With heavy lids

They hid their breasts/ But not the fullness of their lips.

(Pg 7 PAOP)

She can't even complain against it as "Nothing gave her the right/ to speak." (pg 39 PAOP) Dharker uses an indirect method and puts forth her arguments by suggestivity which ultimately proves very, thought provoking. The images in her poems as Ezekiel puts it, "are not merely images created for poetic effect, they are like blazing fires compelling the readers to take notice." ("Imtiaz Dharker" India poetry:online). "A Women's Place" describes the position of women and how she is treated as the 'Other'. According to Siamon de Beauvoir:

One is not born a woman; one becomes one..... The situation of woman is that she...a free and autonomous being like all creatures...nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other. (1984:29)

Although a woman is born free like all creatures but at every step of her life she has bondages imposed on her by the suppressive cultural and social laws made by a prescriptive, patriarchal system. She revolts against all this injustice done to women and is sure and hopeful about a woman's future that one day their condition will change as in "The Rope":

be still, and wait

You are the cause, the victim

And the one witness:

These are tomorrow's cradles rocking. (pg 64-PAOP)

It is through women speakers in the poetry of Dharker that we are able to identify the problems of women in the society. Dharker wants to share the experiences of all women who suffer these inhuman conditions, hence the question:

What you did when the new moon

Sliced you out of purdah,

Your body shimmering through lies. (Pg 9 PAOP)

So according to Chaudhury:

Dharker's women enable us to examine large social problems pertaining to this religion, country and identity. (2006:173-74)

A woman is held responsible for every natural thing (physicality) and suffers a lot in a conservative Muslim family. In "Zarina's Mother" a mother looks at the future onset of puberty in her daughter as some disease:

'Yes I Know what it is she's got....

The disease will flare inside her.' (Pg 35 PAOP)

Religious upbringing plays a crucial role in the conceptual framework particularly of a Muslim girl. So Dharker depicts in "Going Home":

Mummy put me in purdah

Or he'll see the hair sprout in my lap. (Pg 24 PAOP)



In this regard Dharker says:

I feel that women generally are too accepting of the guilt they always feel. I can't remember who said, 'show me a woman who doesn't feel guilty and I'll show you a man'. (Dharker, 1999:114)

So patriarchal culture always tries to bind a woman in the cover of guilt and shame as Dharker depicts in "Purdah I", that a woman carries a "sense of sin between her thighs" although she does not own it, she is forced psychologically to accept it as shame. She gives voice to her consciousness as a victim, also in poems like "Sacrifice" and "Going Home" where it is clearly shown that social customs weigh heavily on a woman's consciousness and the result is fear. In "Sacrifice" she says:

..., sweet/ song will burst through skin, /  
sliced, quit perfectly, between each remembered sin/  
and sacrifice, / a saviour thrusting in. (pg 14 PAOP)

Or in "Going Home":

At twelve/ 'not a mark on her, she'll never have an  
awkward stage'/ his wrinkled white hand slipped  
down her back. (pg 24 PAOP)

One more aspect of the Muslim culture which Dharker criticises is that women are excluded from all religious ceremonies. She objects and feels annoyed that a woman's biology is not regarded suitable for entering a mosque and so is given inhuman treatment. In "Grace" she says:

It is not often...../ that you come across a place  
Where you are sure to find/ some kind of peace.  
the Masjid at least, you think.....  
A woman comes/ With her eyes concealed.  
She trails the mouth behind her.  
We are defiled. (Pg 11 PAOP)

In this pathetic condition and unbearable suffering she desires for mental peace/comfort and for that moves to God. But to her utter shock she finds, in this phallogocentric world God is also male. So she is prohibited from entering a mosque as in her presence men can't concentrate on prayer. These lines reinforce, as Rana Nair remarks, "the idea of a woman as inferior, as a temptress, the very sight of woman is sinful and distracting to the virtuous male." (Guleria,2007:275-281) Women are also supposed to defile the mosque, as menstruation makes them impure. But how strange! Man is produced from the same blood:

Allah u Akbar/ You say the words to reassure yourself  
Your mouth clears/ God the compassionate, the merciful,  
Created man from clots of blood. (Pg 12 PAOP)

So the words coming from Masjid 'Allah u Akbar' seems unsympathetic and artificial to her. In the above lines, Dharker also protests with mock innocence that the thing for which a woman is regarded as 'impure' is the same from which a man is developed. The title of the above poem which is "Grace" is ironic as the whole

poem is about the disgrace of women. In “Prayer” the same idea is conveyed and is about the discrimination against women. The line: “What prayer are they whispering?” (pg 13 PAOP) suggests that there should not be any discrimination on the basis of sex and if so, that worship is of no avail at all. She is constantly demolishing the laws and values of male hegemony which, by using the crutches of Islamic laws, suppresses a woman’s rights. Dharker believes that the basic principles of Islam are made to favour a man and suppress women. She mocks that women have to observe Purdah even from God:

But woman. Woman, / You have learnt  
that when God comes /You hide your head. (Pg 8 PAOP)

Muslim women are taught to recite the holy book mechanically without understanding the meaning in a traditional Islamic culture:

Maulvi’s fat dark fingers  
hustling across the page,  
Nudging words into your head;  
words unsoiled by sense  
Pure rhythm on the tongue. (Pg 5 PAOP)

Dharker objects to these ways and is very critical about the education imparted to Muslim women in this manner through which emphasis is given to learning by heart than understanding it. She narrates her personal experiences:

I'd read the Koran. We had a strict moulvi who rapped us on our knuckles or hit us on our heads if we got the words wrong. I didn't understand a word as it was in Arabic,.....But the point was in the rhythm.....I saw this as part of my culture. (Dharker, 1999: 112)

So the stress is on the rhythm rather than the meaning and if a girl fails to recite it correctly, she is punished very harshly.

In male-dominated cultures religion is used as a cover in order to perform all unholy things. As always, William Shakespeare has the appropriate remark:

it is too much prov'd that/ with devotion's visage/ and pious actions  
we do sugar/ o'er the devil himself. (Shakespeare,1980:121-128)

Dharker exposes the hypocrisy in religious activities through the image of Haji in "Purdah-II":

There was nothing holy in his look.  
Hands that had prayed at Mecca  
Dropped a sly flower on your book. (Pg 6 PAOP)

In the above lines sexual exploitation through religious activities is also indicated. The molvi, who pretends to be very religious, offers flowers to girl in order to molest her that too during the teaching of Quran. So the irony of the religion is revealed in the poem.

Despite all this, Dharker doesn't feel any pity for women but "on the contrary, she celebrates the feminine mystique with an interesting argument." (Naik, 2006:150-51) Hence says in "No-man's Land":

It is the woman who knows  
you can take in/ the invader, time after time,  
And still be whole. (Pg 51 PAOP)

It is the woman who has a capacity to bear and face all this with courage and so is not destroyed in the suppressive male-dominated culture. Dharker wants to do something for women, to alter the condition, although she is not sure but still retains the hope that through her poetry she may change the minds of people. So hopes in "The word":

It is pure power, /Not in the throat or on the page/.....  
It is waiting to be fed / Let loose, one day,  
When its moment comes, / Upon a world unready  
To be stung from sleep. (Pg 58-PAOP)

So Dharker concludes her first book by suggesting that a women's condition can only change when she will be able to break these shackles of culture, religion and society:

The section concludes with a profound revelation that emancipation for a woman has to be only in the breaking of these barricades set by conventional codes of patriarchy and redefining herself. (Baskaran, 2008:33)

She starts her next collection *I Speak For The Devil* (2001) with this effort and dedicated it to all, “who stood up and spoke out....who are still struggling to find their feet and their voices....and who haven’t yet begun.” (Dharker, 2001:introduction)

Thematically, it is concerned with gender issues, the spaces women are allowed to inhabit in different societies and their struggle to break free from restrictive gender roles. (Lehmann 2012 Online)

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, “They’ll say, ‘She Must Be From Another country’” is an anthem of all the women who called themselves as ‘freaks’ and who revolt collectively against rules made by religious leaders and ends with a simplistic self-satisfied proclamation of difference that “I must be from another country” (Pg 38 ISFD). She starts this section by narrating the pathetic condition of the girl who faced the backlash of religious orthodoxy and suffered because she tried to break the shackles of that relation which was a bondage to her. In traditional cultures like Islam, strict sexual codes for women are maintained and if a woman tries to step out by choosing her own husband, or seeking divorce from an abusive husband, she is supposed to bring dishonour to her family and in order to discipline her, she is maimed or executed by her family on the name of ‘honour killing’

to maintain their reputation, spoiled by disobedient woman. As Dharker narrates:

In Lahore, in the last year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a woman was shot by her family in her lawyer's office. Her crime was that she had asked for a divorce. The whole Pakistan senate refused to condemn the act. They called it an 'Honour Killing.' (Dharker,2001:11)

She mocks and revolts this act in the very first poem of the book, "Honour Killing" which she wrote in response to above event and arouses the feelings of the readers by sensitizing them, awakening their consciousness to an urgent feministic concern. Honour killings known as 'karo-kari' in Pakistan and enjoy a high level of support there despite widespread condemnation from human rights associations. According to recent reports, from 1999-2004 more than 4000 women became victims of honour killings in Pakistan. In 2002 alone 245 women died as victims of honour killings in the Sindh province. In 2005, the number of killings increased to 1000 per year in the whole nation. (honour killings-wikipedia) The concept of woman as 'property' and 'honour' is so deeply rooted in the culture of Pakistan that the state ignores the regular occurrences of women being killed by their families. It is also because the religious leaders use justifications from their religious books for sanctioning punishments against the

‘disobedient’ women. The poet feels empathy and desires that all women must protest against these deadly religious sanctions. She mocks the religious authorities that instead of punishing the culprits, the incident was welcomed as Honour Killing. So she is in an open revolt with her culture in “Honour Killing”:

At last I am taking off this coat  
This black veil of a faith  
That made me faithless  
That tied my mouth (Pg 13 ISFD)

Her belief is that a religion that treats its members in such a way can’t claim to be a correct interpretation of faith. So she shuns the faith that doesn’t allow her to enjoy her freedom, before emerging as an independent new free woman.

Its female speaker describes the process of stripping away layer upon layer of tradition and convention to find out who she really is after she has left all these things behind. She starts by taking off this black coat of a country, in the process rejecting a national belonging which is clearly gendered and Islamic as the black coat alludes to the practice of wearing a chador. (Lehmann, 2012 Online)

She feels a sense of restriction due to the gender norms, nationality and religious practices. Symbolically the above claims are reduced to veil in the poem as they snatched away her independence and did not allow her to act according to her own needs and aspirations. She dares to go against the religious laws,



which limit a woman's choice, not only inhibiting her actions as women but also take away her voice so that she could not give vent to her feelings and opinions. In this way she has been made 'faithless' by her religion.

She starts a new journey towards her real identity by stripping herself of her clothes and kills her old self, which suffers dishonouring and humiliation due to the orthodox, restrictive culture in which she is raised. She cast off all claims of this religion, culture and country. In the process of taking off these claims, she realized that she has choices which she had never known before when her life was restricted:

Born wearing it/

I believed I had no choice (pg 13 ISFD)

She removes every part of her body before creating a new geography for herself. She does not even hesitate to remove her womb as she wants to be free from any kind of restriction which could be placed on her due to her sex.

I'm taking off this skin, /

and then the face the flesh,

The womb. (pg 13 ISFD)

Now when she is free from every gender restriction and religious affiliation, she demands:

Let's see/ What I am in here /  
When I squeeze past / The easy cage of bone.

(Pg 13 ISFD)

So the poem is a suitable piece in which she tries to clean herself by stripping herself naked, before creating a new identity for herself. Dharker reflects herself:

If the starting point of *Purdah And Other Poems* was life behind the veil, the starting point of the new book, *I Speak For The Devil*, is the striptease, about what happens when the self 'Squeezes past the, the easy cage of bone. (Subramaniam,2007:Online)

After killing her old self she emerged as a new woman like the phoenix who is born out of her own ashes. She is now free to set her 'geography' by 'crafting', 'plotting' and remake herself anew. So she grows again but this time according to her own beliefs and without restrictions. So in the poem 'Honour Killing' it is not woman who is killed, but "a notion of honour that from the speaker's perspective burdens women with a life that forces them to betray and neglect themselves." (lehmann 2012 Online) Although it is very dangerous to go against religious orthodoxy and face the wrath of religious leaders, Dharker doesn't fear but presents her thoughts and emotions in a bold and uninhibited way and even doesn't hesitate to adopt sin as she, "got fed up with being good." (Pg 68 ISFD) According to Arundhati Subramaniam:

For the process of stripping away superfluity has been not merely cultural and political, but psychological and emotional as well. It's been about cutting away unfruitful frustration and anger. (*The Hindu*, 2002:online)

Dharker takes further this journey towards remaking and rediscovery in fallowed poems like “The Orders”, “Here”, “There”, “Announcing the Departure”, “Announcing the Arrival” etc which also have metaphorical connotations of a journey to some another promising place. In “The Orders” speaker is seen through the eyes of another so her face looks disordered. Her face needed to be seen correctly which can be only done by a broken mirror:

Someone else gives the orders here.....  
why is this mirror broken?  
It makes sense of my disordered face.  
I'll go/ I must have stayed too long  
I've begun to look like you. (pg 14 ISFD)

Dharker recalls the powerlessness of women and how they are subordinated and even alienated from their own selves, so there is an urgent need to start journey towards self-refashioning. “There” is marked by a sense of regret towards past as ‘there’ was a chaotic place in which somebody else was making decisions for you while you (woman) had neither any choice nor voice. So, in order to defend her rights and change her condition, she requires some other face. In “Announcing the Departure” says:

I think my body is asking  
To be in some promised place.  
I think my body is begging  
For another face. (Pg 20 ISFD)

“Announcing the Arrival” is the only poem in this section which focuses on the men. The poet refers to a new century which would not be of men. The poem is crowded with ‘tired businessmen’ who were ‘once thin boys’ who have: “grown to men who struggled/ past a paunch to tie/ their feet into shoes.” (pg 27 ISFD) The poet presents these men as old and inflexible and soon their time will be over and soon they will be eaten up by their own words.

The next poem “Monsoon Words” thus depicts a future belonging to women. There will be opportunities for them to change the realities of their lives. This is presented through the girl in ‘monsoon words’ who run on a road full of possibilities that were impossible before:

Look away and the rain will fall/ on to your mouth.../  
we belong in this time/ after all. ( pg 28 ISFD)

The city’s sea-shore, once belonged to only the ‘thin boys’ in the previous poem now also belong and accommodate the speaker and other women. Thus she looks more hopefully at the present and to the future. The next poem “Announcing the Arrival (for Ayesha)” is even stronger in sentiment. The speaker celebrates the end of the

century that was announced earlier in first ‘arrival’ poem. She is happy to leave her past that used to constrain her as a new and better century is waiting for her:

The hypocrites, the prudes / running our lives  
With their holier-than-thou prissy attitudes  
The bigots with offended sensibilities  
The bastards..... (Pg 31 ISFD)

Dharker is optimistic about the future of new generation girls like her daughter Ayesha, who have a ‘silvered’ future ahead. She encourages these new generation girls as the power to transform the world lies in their hands, so that everything becomes possible for them, if they want, she believes:

The world shifts/ with a lift of your hair....  
Let’s scream.....let’s wear red. (Pg 33 ISFD)

After creating a space for herself the questions of religion, gender and nationality no longer bother her. She is now securely positioned and has rejected all belongingness to any one religion, culture or country. So in “Not a Muslim Burial” she does not want to be associated with any religion even after her death. So prophecies:

No one must claim me.....  
No name, no nationality  
Let them label the remains  
Lost property. (Pg 37 ISFD)

The last poem of the section “They’ll Say, “She must be from another Country” shows a more positive attitude of the poet.

She rejects everyone defiantly. No matter who attempts to control her thoughts norms and conventions because she recognizes these as arbitrary artificial constructs. ( Lehmann 2012 online)

She is now happy and feels a sense of pride in not belonging to any one culture as she has grown too big to fit in these constructions now:

And I’ll be happy to say/ I never learned your customs /  
I don’t remember your language./ or know your ways /  
I must be/ from another country. (pg 39 ISFD)

Dharker in a revolt imagines a separate country in the poem for herself and all other women, where they will not be forced to follow customs and ways sanctioned by these frauds and hypocrites:

May be there is a country/ where all of us live,  
All of us freaks / who are not able to give  
Our loyalty to fat old fools, / the crooks and thugs....  
Who Puff out their chests,/ Put their feet on our necks,  
And break their own rules. (Pg 38 ISFD)

She does not care now for those who make judgements and thrust their values on women. She calls women to reject the societal and religious norms imposed on them. At the end of her

journey she is free from all these imposed forces and values and succeed in tracing a new identity for her.

The second section of the book is “The Broken Umbrella” which presents the lives of women and how their feelings become disembodied from their bodies as in “In a cold place”:

My glove is waiting / For our needs to coincide, /  
for the moment when / its warm mouth, /  
my cold fingers/ will happily, collide. (Pg 46 ISFD)

So she “continues the theme of women being alienated from their true selves.” (King, 2002:88) In “Dot” all the women have achieved a mutual understanding, “we have found the voice/ we share”. (pg 49 ISFD) The “Knees” further proceed towards an acceptance and understanding of her position, so is possible for her to see’ “nothing broken/ I just feel a bit / more rounded suddenly.” (pg 50 ISFD) The last poem of this section “Yellow Today” presents speaker optimistically realistic so states:

I am busy making dreams/ for the daylight to eat/  
when it gets up...../ This hunger is shouting for attention./  
It wants your soul. (pg 53 ISFD)

So at the end of this section she is ready to revenge for her past terribly miserable condition and dismantle male hegemony.

In the third long section, “I Speak For The Devil” which is also the title given to entire volume she enjoys her freedom when possessed by the devil. She adopts in it the devil’s voice to speak freely because as a woman she is denied this freedom of speech. This section present a woman’s body as a territory possessed by herself or by somebody else like a child or a devil. According to her, women are respected only when they carry someone else inside their bodies and only in that condition they are listened to and set free. So the title of the book *I Speak For The Devil* acknowledges that when a woman carries a devil within her then and only she is allowed to speak and able to enjoy her freedom. When in the poem “The Djinn in Auntie”, the auntie is possessed by a djinn, it proves a blessing in disguise for her as after it she opens her mouth and expresses her thoughts openly. Through the ‘djinn’ or devil, she is actually speaking for herself :

But one night when she went down.....  
That was when the djinn got in.....  
Next day, / when she opened her mouth  
And the other voice began to sing. (Pg 57 ISFD)

So due to the devil i.e djinn within her, she “looked bigger every day, awash / with knowledge” (pg 57 ISFD) She expresses herself through the devil and knows it well that without the devil inside her “she’d be lost” so the “djinn was a gift/ she got one day.”



(Pg 58 ISFD) In the poem, the woman is actually set free when she is 'possessed'. Now she adopts the voice of devil, nobody can stop her now to express her feelings and thoughts. So she got an opportunity to expose so called 'great leaders' of Pakistan like Ayub Khan Din who are responsible for suppressing women of their land and on the other hand themselves enjoying in another land by drinking wine and telling stories of their women "to a woman in a skin-tight skirt/ that shows all of her legs." (Pg 58 ISFD) She exposes the hypocrisy of these leaders who on the one hand restrict their own women and on the other hand enjoy the company of naked English women.

However it does not mean that she is rejecting her religion wholly but only its practices which are organised by so called 'religious leaders'. Dharker is disgusted by the behaviour and attitude of religious leaders and goes to the extent of abusing them. So in the poem "All of us" many women's voice like Rehmat Ali's wife, Raju's mother, Mala, Naseem, Mary, Anita, Fatima, Sarah and Dharmyanti merge into one as they all are subject to the same servitude- physical, psychological, social and cultural, but at the end they dare to step out of their bounds and challenge patriarchal culture. According to Simone de Beauvoir:

Much more interesting are the insurgent females who have challenged this unjust society, a literature of protest can engender sincere and powerful work. (de Beauvoir,1984:718)

All the women in the poem awoke now. After adopting the voice of devil they are able to shun away all restrictions imposed on them by religious and cultural forces and are able to hear each other laugh and scream:

They can say we're out of control

They can say we've gone/ to the devil. (Pg 61 ISFD)

With the devil within her, sujata in the next poem "Power" is able to enjoy her freedom as now she has freed herself from cultural and religious bonds. Now she is not any longer in that subordinate condition but is respected and consulted in important matters. So it is the first time that people:

Look at me and see / More than clothes....

I close my mouth / to keep the freedom in

(Pg 63 ISFD)

The next poem "Breeding ground, Chicago" is dedicated to Christine, who got a new face provided to her by the djinn/devil, who enters into her and promises a new life to her by shaping her thoughts anew:

That's how the devil got in,

Slipped into my skin,  
Rearranged my thoughts  
Like old clothes at the change/ of the season.

(Pg 64 ISFD)

The Devil provides every woman, irrespective of their religion and culture, the opportunity to revenge and express her ideas freely. Not only Islam but every religion restricts a woman's life. So after attaining a new identity these women, exposes all the havocs and oppressions done to them by using religious values in a frank and authentic way. Dharker expresses in "The Location":

I realised quite soon.....  
The devil was in me, / walking in my feet,  
Living in my clothes, / owning one half  
Of my heart. (Pg. 74 ISFD)

So through devil within her she enjoys her freedom. Dharker speaks for the devil in *I Speak For The Devil* but :

She does not feature a Miltonic Lucifer, Faustian double-dealer or sulphurous Beelzebub. But one who lurks in the khassi (toilet in Punjabi); he possesses people.....he can even be confused. Dharker says, 'beyond the confusion is anger, acidic dribbles of rage as precise as the design of frost on a window.' (Pinto, 2004: online)

So the devil she enjoys inside her is not the grand 'Lucifer' but one who lives with people in their day to day lives, sometimes amusing, disturbing and at other times frightening.

Taking the opportunity of the Devil's voice Dharker uses it as a weapon to expose hypocrisy of both religious leaders and their activities and attacked them in several of her poems. In "Saviours", Dharker exposes the hypocrisy of those men who have "a rare genius for revenge". (Pg 85 ISFD) All the 'unholy' men carry holy books and wear masks of holy men. They call themselves our saviours but in reality they are the cause of all our disasters and social tensions.

It's hard to say  
Who's on which side.  
All the murderess are wearing/ Masks  
With god's face painted on. (pg 88 ISFD)

In "Guardians" she mocks religious leaders:

Strange how the guardians  
Of our morals.....  
Slither into juicy things  
Where they don't belong. (Pg 88 ISFD)

Dharker raises her voice against those prescriptive rules of religion that have crushed humanity in humans. The holiness and divinity of God has been lost. There is no faith and devotion in man. Another poem "Great Glory" also exposes the hypocrisy of man and his shameful conduct. He doesn't even spare God and uses his name for all his misdeeds. Dharker reveals the humiliation of God as:

God was hijacked long ago,  
Held hostage in empty churches,  
Desecrated temples, / Broken mosques. (Pg 98 ISFD)

Dharker “spoke for God even as someone whose beliefs had been eroded” (Pinto, 2004 Online) So in the name of religion, and God man creates havoc everywhere, he doesn’t need religious places now to glorify his name but his “work is in every/ daily newspaper.../ and on every T V” (pg 98 ISFD). This is an ironic statement made by Dharker as now man is no more involved in doing good deeds for the sake of religion but whatever destruction he creates is broadcast either on TV or in newspapers.

Freedom is the prime need of women and Dharker seeks it through “This Room” in which she enjoys her freedom as her room is breaking out of its confines and seeking ‘space’, ‘light’, ‘empty air’. Thus she says:

This is the time and place/ to be alive. (pg 87 ISFD)

In order to maintain this freedom, she appeals every woman that she should revolt against these repressive norms of man-orientated culture which reduces a woman to a mere Skelton. In “Canvas”:

I don’t want  
A face that simpers harmlessly.....  
Someday I plan to draw it

Interesting, dangerous, / cruel. (Pg 102 ISFD)

She is very happy with the devil's face painted on as it provides her opportunities she has never known. In "Yes, I drank the wine" says:

Yes I drank the wine/ Today I'm free

to party with the djinn. (pg 119 ISFD)

So what Dharker aims through her poetry is that life should be free from limiting and immoral prescriptions of culture, religion and politics. Through *I Speak For The Devil* She tries to explore the place and identity of women in contemporary complex world. According to her 'the final act of faith can only be an act of love.' (Pinto, 2004 Online) She did not believe in a concept of traditional God but the God as 'goodness' in human beings. So in order to legitimize a space for woman in the world, she uses a defiant voice aiming to free women from bondages of culture, society and religion. Alan Ross remarks about *I Speak For The Devil* in London Magazine:

Beautiful ambivalence.....realistic details take on a surrealistic menace in another context.....These poems deal very powerfully with social, religious, racial and above all sexual entrapment. (cover pg ISFD)

In short, *Purdah And Other Poems* starts with an exploration of the female body under the veil and how this veil becomes a barrier

between her inner and outer world. Thus portraying through it the struggle of women with an oppressive culture and social norms and the challenges they face in the modern world with its changing mores. But at the end, she successfully leaves behind her past tradition with its religious restrictions and cultural impositions:

A past that you agreed / to leave behind (Pg 57 PAOP)

*I Speak For The Devil* takes away further, aspects of gender and religion and is about a journey towards self-discovery and self-refashioning. It starts with a new search for herself where she has cast off all claims of nationality, religion and gender and explores a new terrain for herself. She removes every part of her body before creating a new geography for herself and at the end successfully creates her own identity in “Exorcism”:

I’m letting all the bad things  
Fall away, I’m no one  
But myself  
No one possesses me. (ISFD pg 127)

# Chapter IV

## **Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker: A Comparison**



**Mamta Kalia**



**Imtiaz Dharker**



Contemporary Indian women's poetry in English deals with the problems and issues of women in contemporary society. Their poetry is seriously involved in deconstructing the submissive roles deployed to women by the patriarchal norms of society. Consequently, their poetry depicts a power-struggle between the two sexes and they respond to this struggle according to their faith, experiences, training and exposure to the outside world and their desire for empowerment. As R D Bhattacharya remarks:

These new women poets stand poles apart from their predecessor, Kamala Das. At the same time they are rooted in her and linked with her, sharing the same ambience and the same concerns. These poets and perhaps women poets anywhere, inhabit the same woman's world. It is impossible to get out of one's skin. They possess distinctly feminine sensibilities. (Pandey,2007:200)

Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker belong to two major religious faiths of the Indian society and represent a cross-section of Indian women. Both poets reveal their anger against the patriarchal social set-up and try to dislodge this system through their poetry. Since

the life of women is more restricted in Islam, Dharker's rebellion against it proved her as an iconic/dynamic feminist voice in contemporary Indian women's poetry in English. She protests in a highly emotional tone against a repressive, organised/constructs Islamic tradition which restricts a woman's life to the domestic sphere, presenting her ideas through powerful images and symbols. Having both literal and metaphorical connotations, her poetry captures the heart of every woman particularly the Muslim woman who suffers under oppressive norms. Her exposure to the western world develops in her a cosmopolitan outlook, and enables her to present the woes and sufferings of women not only in Islam but throughout the world in different cultures, with a deeper sense of involvement and consciousness. She is a global poet whose works speaks plainly but touches highly with great emotional intelligence to anyone who has ever felt adrift in the increasingly complex, multicultural and shrinking world we inhabit. She not only write but also read her poems at different occasions to different audience. In an interview with Arundhati Subramaniam, she admits:

I don't think the audience has dumbled down. It's just that there's so much communication nowadays that poetry which in any case is a demanding form requires even more effort to read now than it did 30 years ago. (Subramaniam, 2001 Online)

Mamta Kalia, living and brought up in India looks at the overall problems and issues of women in Indian society and presents it from a dispassionate angle. Her observations present a realistic image of the man-woman relationship in Indian culture. She exposes ruthlessly, the oppression of Indian middle-class women in their families, married life and at large by the male-dominated culture, which is not only social and cultural, but psychological as well. Her presentation of the woes and agonies of women with a touch of irony under patriarchal subjugation and revolt against it prove her a fierce feministic voice in contemporary Indian English poetry. Her poetry is devoid of an aggressiveness which is usually found in Dharker.

Kalia and Dharker come from two different cultures and faiths so their individual choices, attitudes, preferences and points of view in their literary expression may differ, yet they have a number of fundamental concerns and themes which are common as both women-poets who suffer under repressive male-dominated norms of society. The predicament of women in contemporary patriarchal societies is central to both of them. As both the poets are aware of the injustice meted out to women, they respond and revolt against it in their own ways.

Irony is a weapon in the hands of women writers through which they can easily register their anger and anguish. It is something between what they are saying and what they actually want to say. Both the poets, particularly Kalia, use it at its best in their poetry to express their resentment against the patriarchal world. Kalia writes in “Sheer Good Luck”:

But nothing ever happened to me.  
Except two children.  
And two miscarriages. (pg 11 TTPOP)

Similarly Dharker in “Saviours”:

The price of onions have gone up  
The men around the table  
Decided it is appropriate/ to go to war. (Pg 80 ISFD)

Dharker mocks authorities in an ironic tone that instead of solving day to day problems of people, they indulge in creating havoc through wars. She exposes the pretentious and cunning ways of these so-called ‘civilized’ leaders.

The poetry of both Kalia and Dharker is confessional and autobiographical to a large extent. Both poets depict their personal experiences and reveal their own dissatisfactions and sufferings in such a way that their subjective concerns became objective and universal.

Dharker revolted against her religion by marrying a non-Muslim, Anil Dharker, and was punished by her community by excommunicating her. She narrates her experiences:

I met Anil, we eloped, and my family cut me off completely for the next fifteen years. ( Dharker, 1999:112)

She gives vent to these feelings and emotions in the poem “Purdah II”:

Naseem, you ran away

.....

You are remembered among the dead... (pg 10 PAOP)

So like Dharker herself, her protagonist in the poem Naseem too is supposed to be “dead” by her family when she tries to choose her own destiny.

Women poets are confessional and sometimes have quite candidly written about their experience of marriage. Married life has given them unbearable pain and tension. They try to write about reasons that are responsible for the breakdown or dissatisfaction in marriage. Kalia was frustrated and dissatisfied in her relation with her husband for his typical patriarchal ideology. She depicts it through various poems like “I Am A Great Fool”, “Come”, “I Must Write Nicely Now”, “What could he Do”,

“Dubious Lovers” et al. She narrates her experiences and conflicts with her husband:

Here we were, my husband Ravi and I,.....we had broken all barriers to get together. But barriers and terriers on two legs kept hounding us. (Kalia, 1999:59)

In “What Could he Do” she writes:

I lost my patience  
He was asking for things far beyond my reach.  
After a dramatic pause  
I rose and walked away. (pg. 23 P-78)

Marriage is viewed as a patriarchal Strategy and according to Simon de Beauvoir, “is an obscene bourgeois institution.” (de-Beauvoir,1984) which is used as a trap against women as through it she is supposed to find ‘satisfaction’ in the performance of her duties and varied roles as wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc under the norms sanctioned by patriarchal society. Dharker mocks at the roles assigned to women, through her various poems and how they are silenced by imposing different roles on them:

The next they said she must sit still  
And shut her mouth  
She did it for a while  
Right through a marriage and a child. (Pg 57 ISFD)

In fact “Marriage is the mechanism by which the patriarchy is maintained” (Del, 1981:37). After marriage, a woman is involved

in other duties to such an extent she gets no time to think about her own self until her life ends. According to Susie Tharu:

When the conjugal relation is brightened by mutual love, the happy wife has nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action, but since wives have never known from the beginning what freedom is, they are well content to remain in bondage. (Tharu, 1991:247)

So women try to find their satisfaction in the conjugal relation and ignore their individual choices and happiness. Kalia reflects on this condition in an ironic mode:

I now have a house  
Full of you and your world. (Pg 20 P-78)

But both the poets attack this age old tradition set by the male cultures by using high tones of mock irony. Dharker particularly revolts against it as she says:

Your tongue must learn to keep still  
This I've heard often,  
Keeping my tongue still  
All of my life,  
Has been a highly recommended skill. (Pg 22 ISFD)

Kalia is also disgusted and bored with this institution so cries:

I am a great fool.  
To think that marriage is bliss. (Pg 08 P-78)

The suffocation of an arranged loveless marriage is expressed by almost every woman poet since Kamala Das. Their

disappointments and disgusts at the mechanical relationships with their male counterparts which is sensual and devoid of love and emotional understanding is clearly depicted in their poetry. Both Dharker and Kalia present this pain and ennui of a love-less relationship. Kalia presents the idea through poems like “Come”:

Let's not come close during intercourse

But mark a distance

Touch each other like dead-wire. (pg 11 P-78)

Dharker hints the same thought in “Battle-line”:

Distrustful lovers/who had fought bitterly/.....

But in sleep, drifted slowly.....

To fit together/ whole again; at peace.....

Until, in the quite dawn,/ the next attack ( pg 47 PAOP)

So in a moment of lust, they forget their hostilities and come close to each other for a while but immediately after it are caught back in the same condition of lovelessness.

The unkindness of men towards women is clearly indicated in the poems of both. Indian women often give their whole life in service of their husbands and treat them like gods and in return the husbands don't acknowledge their sacrifices but always try to suppress them under their power. So Dharker protests:

The other side of god / was you

One day I blinked/ and fell into your mouth



My own power swallowed me. (Pg 62 ISFD)

Kalia also presents the shallowness of men in various poems. In fact she is not afraid of anything in the world except the 'naked man' as she says:

You've beaten some dead.

You've buried others alive. (Pg 28 TTPOP)

Despite all this, a woman is always ready to submit herself to her husband in order to make him happy and for the sake of that she doesn't care about her own health etc. Dharker criticises/exposes the situation in "There":

The master of the house

When you came home,

We crept around you quietly,

Massaged your feet. (Pg 17 ISFD)

And Kalia says:

But the moment I hear your footsteps

I put all of me together

And give you my best smile. (Pg 30 TTPOP)

House-hold drudgery is another cause of discontentment besides marriage where a woman feels exploited and tortured, as it snatches away the freedom and identity of a woman from her and makes her dependent on men. As a result, she is not able to develop

her other potentialities and capacities which are latent in her, and is severely condemned by women poets. According to Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963):

Our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role. (Tendon, 2008:95)

So our culture is structured in such a way which provides women no time for themselves but keeps them busy in house-hold engagements and exhausts all their time and energy on others. In such a state, she is turned into an alienated being, an entirely other person. Dharker exposes the situation in the poem “Another Woman” as:

She crouched, as usual, on the floor  
Beside the stove  
When the men came home  
She did not look into his face  
Nor raise her head, but bent  
Her back, a little more  
Nothing gave her the right/ to speak. (pg 39 PAOP)

In an interview with Tanu Gupta Mamta Kalia reveals:

I still remember when I used to cook, I used to dust ‘atta’ from clothes and get into the car and move to college. I also couldn’t leave my family hungry..... the progressive career of a girl is hampered in marriage because a girl may be expected to be at a certain place at a certain time by our traditional family. (Kalia, 2010: 209)

Kalia also speaks out in “Matrimonial Bliss” :

And in the evening you go out

.....

Asking me to keep note of milk and bread. (Pg 30 TTPOP)

In this condition, a woman is frustrated and depressed. She is not able to confirm her identity so exhibits different characters at different times as Dharker in “White Carnation: Voice II” says:

At times I am the tiger.

At times the goat

Usually I smile, to reassure them. (pg 20 PAOP)

And Kalia in “Inside Out”:

A part of me is a jackal,

A part of me is an ass

.....

And I often feel

That a whole culture

Within me, lies foul (pg 13 Poems’78)

So both poets expose the contradictions in women’s psyche and character. In order to perform her roles well in the society she has to go through a change in herself.

In convention-ridden patriarchal societies, laws are designed in such a way that a woman’s own family turns into a suppressive

force and so becomes responsible for ruining a woman's life. Kalia in "Tribute to Papa" is highly critical of her father as he thrusts his own ideas and values on her and makes her repressed by snatching away her will and independence. In an interview she states:

I was a rebel like in the sense my parents were very methodical people.... I wanted to bite. I wanted to bite everybody. I wanted to express myself in the worst of words. It was very dissatisfactory. As a young girl of 27, I was not happy at all. I had to live a life which I never wanted. (Kalia, 2010: 212)

So she mocks at her father in the poem "Tribute to Papa":

You're not sure what greatness is,  
But you want me to be great. (pg 9 TTPOP)

Likewise, Dharker expresses her wrath against her family members in "Choice i":

Finally who will she be  
when the choices are made,  
When the choosers are dead. (pg 40 PAOP)

As a result, she is very resentful towards her family who made choices for her and pushed her into a miserable condition. She was not even allowed to choose a life-partner for herself as he is also chosen by her family without consulting her, so whosoever they chose is, "Remote in your decisions." (Pg 17 ISFD) Dharker gives vent to her anger:

There she goes, your mother,

Still plotting at your wedding

Long after she is dead. (pg 7 PAOP)

In spite of pushing her into a pathetic condition, Kalia still feels sympathetic towards her family, so doesn't reveal her miserable condition to them but swallows everything as she does not want to hurt them. So in "After Eight Years of Marriage" she says:

So I swallowed everything,

and smiled a smile of great content. (pg 26 P-78)

On the other hand, Dharker does not sympathise but abuses them for her sufferings in "Another Woman":

The usual words came and beat

Their wings against her, the money spent,

Curses heaped upon the parents,

Who had sent her out

To darken other people's doors. (pg 38 PAOP)

Interestingly, mothers have a great role in Indian culture in pushing away their daughters into their own fate, either consciously or unconsciously. This is one more weapon used by patriarchy in which one woman is used to subjugate another woman not physically but psychologically and socially as well. So whatever women did or want to do in such a culture they "think back through their mothers". (Woolf, 1929: 93) Dharker says in "Purdah II":

And sank, sank into the mould  
Of her mother's flesh/ and mind, (pg 9 PAOP)

Their voice is argumentative, complaining and resentful towards their mothers. They hold the mother responsible for their predicament and sufferings.

The mother has been accused of acceding to the man-made sexist frame-work of society sans asserting her will and keeping mum about her wishes and longings..... (Sing, 2008:76)

Similarly, Kalia has a highly ironic tone when she criticises her mother in "Brat":

Looking at my navel  
I'm reminded of you, Mamma.....  
You, perhaps, were hardly proud  
Of your creativity. (Pg 20 TTPOP)

The mother does not seem happy because the new-born is a female. So it is the mother here who prefers a male child and gives secondary preference to a girl child.

A woman is made to feel a sense of 'shame' from her very birth through adolescence and with age, the sense of sin hampered into her mind by society gets crystallized. "Culture uses shame to repress female sexuality and the independence of spirit which is a part of it." (King, 2001:322) Kalia presents in "Brat" that nobody is happy with the birth of a female baby, even the mother- since the

birth of a girl child is itself considered as a ‘shame’ in Indian Culture and complains that her mother was hardly proud of her birth. The girl child is made conscious of her physique as ‘sin’-. as a result, she unconsciously feels guilty of her body and self as Dharker presents in “Going Home”:

Mummy put me in Purdah

Or he’ll see the hair sprout in my lap. (pg 24 PAOP)

According to Simone-de-Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*:

They are women by virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that occurred. . . .they have gained only what men have been willing to grant, they have taken nothing, they have only received. (Beauvoir, 1984:13-15)

So in order to make women subordinate, a sense of sin is hammered into them so that they do not raise their head but always feel guilty of their ‘physicality’. This ideology is created by the patriarchal laws in order to make a woman submissive and weak. So both the poets challenge this mythical ideology in their poetry. Dharker, especially, revolts openly against it in the poem “Stone”:

Your history is a trapdoor

That you must struggle through

Blinking from the darkness

Into a shower of light. (pg 54 PAOP)

The suppression of women through patriarchal forces which is, “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, Sylvia, 1990) is the main theme of both poets. But this oppression becomes more psychic than social which obviously assumes a secondary position. So both poets take as their primary job, the revealing of the inner life of women and their conflicts.

Dharker’s main concern is to bring out the woes and sufferings of women under Muslim patriarchy and particularly expose the purdah system and its consequences. So through the ‘Purdah’ poems, she exposes how patriarchy uses purdah to limit a woman’s life and restricts her freedom. But while she examines the sufferings of Muslim women her themes become universal as she herself confirms:

Yes, the poems are about being a woman, and not just a Muslim woman. I don’t see myself as a spokes woman for the community. I feel that women generally are too accepting of the guilt they always feel. (Dharker, 1999:114)

As a result, her themes take on a universal validity.

Kalia’s forte on the other hand is to present the agony of the average Indian middle-class housewife, the agonies and frustrations as she feels tortured, exploited, cheated, and alienated



in a male dominated culture. So she revolts against it in most of her poems. She is mainly disgusted with the man-woman relationship and presents it with a strong use of irony in poems like “New Deal”, “Dubious Lovers”, “Matrimonial Bliss”, “I Am A Great Fool”, “I Feel Like Crying All The Time” etc. So both the poets demand independence of mind, spirit and body from patriarchal domination. Both poets express their concern for the contemporary social, cultural and political conditions by using a highly satirical and sarcastic tone.

Mamta Kalia is also very dissatisfied with the contemporary world around her, particularly her nation India which is full of social and political corruption, restricting familial ties and deterioration of human values. She gives vent to her anger through her poetry, challenges the rigid set up and its self-made rules in which she fears she might lose her identity and individuality. “In Delhi” she depicts the lack of warmth, love and understanding among people, so cries: “In Delhi/ the sea/ could have really gone dry”. (pg 11 P-78) “Positive Thinking” brings to limelight modern man’s preoccupation with material pursuits in which he even forgets death and God. The tone is highly ironic:

Let us forget your death and mine.

We have so much to remember. (pg 26 TTPOP)

“Hell” exposes the corruption in the Govt offices. She is puzzled:

They will throw you out  
If they detect you going wrong somewhere,  
Or right everywhere. . (Pg 23 TTPOP)

So she shuns all hope in political systems and suggests:

Give up all hope  
Ye that enter the kingdom of government service.  
(Pg 23 TTPOP)

Poems like “Sunday song”, “seize the day”, “An active life” depict her boredom with modern urban living and poems such as “Sheer good Luck”, “Brat”, “Dedicated Teacher”, “I do feel national”, “No one expired”, “Tit for Tat” are all social commentaries in which she mocks and revolts against the establishment and its rules. She is very disappointed with the political system of her country as even after attaining freedom, the condition of an average middle-class man hasn’t changed but becomes worse / uglier, hence her rebellion:

In the name of freedom.  
I’ve been fooled not once but twice.  
Let it suffice/ They in Delhi do not know  
What it is to live like mice  
I’ll ever be a rebel.....

As long as I'm made to linger and not live. (Pg 7 P-78)

She is very concerned about the growing poverty of her country and holds the govt responsible for it. No doubt our country is developing by leaps and bounds but the condition of the poor man hasn't altered but is the same. She lashes out at politicians:

Your capital earns you multi-profits.

And you don't understand

Why Champabai's baby cries in her arms.

You victoriously vegetate

You do not know

Why people agitate. (Pg 14 P-78)

Imtiaz Dharker's forte is political themes and the conflicts between different cultures created by religious fundamentalism. Bruce King has rightly said about her that she "brought to Indian poetry a different background and a sense of political commitment." (King, 2001:321) Her poetry is to a large extent concerned with political injustice. She tries to explore how political tensions are created by different religious forces and how it affects the world around it. She, while analysing her personal situation in society moves to examine larger social problems:

All of life is political. Politics extends into everything. Every act is political. We in the third world are faced with this on a day today basis. (Dharker, 1999:116)

She explores the conflict and tension between religious and secular cultures in the present world in which emergent fundamentalisms create fear and tension. In the contemporary world, religious and political forces are antagonising peoples. So Dharker registers her anger in her poetry against this tension which is not merely cultural and political but affects us psychologically and emotionally as well. In “Seats Of Power” she writes:

Here in this quiet civil room  
Permissions has been given  
For the carnage to begin  
It's not Bombay that burns,  
But this specific child  
Screaming behind a bolted door;  
The particular man on fire  
Trapped inside his locked car. (King, 2001:325)

Communal violence is the main theme to which she draws our attention:

Imtiaz Dharker's poems are essentially an offering of hope in the face of violence; not just the violence of men, who, she says, have a 'rare genius for revenge' but also from our societies and ourselves. (Doshi, 2004 online)

Her concern is to examine a community caught up in communal tension and violence. She wonders how people use the name of God while perpetuating horrors of every kind. In “Still” she says:

A sweetly offered garland  
Blows off someone's head.....  
Ask the men carrying/ holy books  
Ask God/ he knows. (pg 85 ISFD)

Through the poem, "The Right Word" Dharker examines the world particularly the post 9/11 situation, created by religious fundamentalism. The poet tries to find a solution by moving from the personal to the political level. In this sense, the poem "No Man's Land" is more angry in tone and political in purpose, but retains a feministic tone as well:

we are countries out of reach.....  
every borderline becomes a battlefield.  
And every night an act of faith. (PAOP pg 50-51).

The effect and havoc created by all this is clearly indicated in her various poems. In "The List":

Sudden impact / the city flies apart.  
.....  
This must be how war feels:  
When ordinary things lose  
Their sense of gravity. (Dharker,1997:57)

In "8 January 1993":

A match is struck and thrown  
The burning has begin.  
Afterwards  
The bodies are removed

One by one. (Dharker,1997:56)

She writes poetry with a philosophical touch and questions the Almighty and those beliefs that create this tension between different communities. She says in “The Devil To God”:

Dear sir, / I’m a fan of all your programmes,  
But the promos are bad. / Who writes your scripts?  
Can I apply ? (pg 97 ISFD)

Mamta Kalia’s poetry presents an ambiguity as at times her response to different relationships is very cold. Her dislike and even rejection of her relationships is clearly indicated in her poems and still there are poems in which an emotional attachment is indicated e.g she ‘misses’ her husband’s company in “Sunday-Song”. In the poem “New Deal” she is ready to forget everything and start her life anew:

Let’s live all over again;/.....  
In short, let’s forget/ the proverbial thorn  
And smell the proverbial rose. (pg 18 TTPOP)

In “Love cure”, she is able to cope with her loneliness just by writing her husband’s name on her palm repeatedly. Other poems like “Before Time Outlives Us” also indicate her obsession/emotional clings towards her husband. Likewise in “Tribute To Papa”, she, although rejecting the father first, but towards the end

feels a compulsion to be obedient to him only due to her emotional attachment with her father.

But I'll be careful, papa

Or I know you'll at once think of suicide. (pg 10 TTPOP)

“After Eight years of Marriage” also depicts her love and sympathetic attitude towards her parents as she doesn't want to hurt them by making them aware of her miseries. So at the end the very rebellious Mamta Kalia accepts her destiny as a weak woman living in the patriarchal society. She has also learnt this fact that to remain happy it is better to flatter a male as, “But ever since I learn to flatter/I was happy” (pg 22 p-78). So, at the end she is happy by compromising with male-dominated society and is ready to go along with it.

Whereas Dharker is throughout consistent in her behaviour and her poetry is throughout rebellious. She exposes the repressive rules of her religion and other relationships which turned out to be the main cause of her sufferings. Her revolt is very fierce and doesn't end anywhere but it grows with each poetic collection:

This hunger is shouting for attention

It wants your soul. (Pg 52 ISFD)

*Purdah And Other Poems* shows how the female body is subjugated under the veil. *I Speak For The Devil* goes further and

denies everything under which she is subjugated. In it she breaks all silences and express herself freely:

Today I broke / a silence.

You cut the blindfolds off my words. (Pg 47 ISFD)

In this volume, women are presented through the portraits of Satan who speaks for them. So there is no ambiguity in her poems. Whatever she wants to convey, she presents it clearly by a powerful use of images and metaphors. There is a strong intensity in her revolt against patriarchal laws. She raises her voice against the discrimination meted out to women in general and becomes their representative.

Kalia's language is free from the conventions of a formal structure. She writes in direct, conversational and colloquial style. Her poems are so simple that they sometimes become mere statements like the poem, "No One Expired":

No one expired in the hospital/ Today

What a day! (pg 10 P-78)

But her poetry which is apparently plain and straightforward shows a strong use of irony, satire and sarcasm. In this sense, she is very candid and direct. She often starts her poems with a conflict, then, in-order to intensify it, inserts some ironic statements or contrastive images and ends it with a note of satire or sarcasm



epigrammatically like, “Who cares for you”, “I’ll hit you; I’ll tear you up!” She also uses animal imagery such as pelican, dove, jackal, Swan, Fawn et al in order to reveal her inner being through her poetry. Her tone is elegiac and compassionate. There is ultimately a deep sadness underlying her apparently plain poetry.

Dharker’s language is complex- full of living images, symbols and metaphorical connotations, e.g in “Purdah I” she compares the purdah with the earth that falls on coffins after dead men are put in. She creates an image which does not have one but several connotations, as a woman is given the treatment of a dead man while she is still alive. Her ‘Purdah’ has not only literal connotations but metaphorical as well. It is not only the veil of the body but also a veil of the mind. Like Kalia, she also uses animal imagery such as lamb, goat, tiger dead men and women, and ghosts.

Both poets find a catharsis or mental satisfaction through their literary expression. Mamta Kalia says that in poetry she finds some kind of emancipation from her inner turmoil:

In my hour of discontent  
I neither shout nor rant  
I simply fill ink in my pen  
And spill it with intent. (pg 17 P-78)

Words provide women the safest medium for voicing their anguish. Viktor E Frankl talks about “logotherapy” (Frankl,1984:125-26) which considers the process of writing as a person’s quest for meaning- of life, existence, love, loss and sufferings. According to him, it is the existential distress or frustration that propels humans to search for the meaning of their existence, and what he calls, “the will to meaning.” (Sing, 2008:199)

Accordingly, for Mamta Kalia creative writing is, “a lone man’s battle against the enormous uncertainty of this universe.” (Kalia, 1999:63) and for Dharker it is:

a quest, an attempt, a mad hope that something could be better if the poem was written- not for the world, of course. May be for God. Maybe just for me. (Subramaniam,2002:Online)

So Imtiaz Dharker also finds enormous strength in words:

It is pure power.....  
Prepared to heal or wound  
Give birth to a whole nest  
Of hunger thought. ( p-58 PAOP)

Women writers lay bare their hearts while expressing their feelings and emotions. Both Kalia and Dharker present their deep

and intense emotions through their poetry. They express their experiences of being women writers:

Life for an educated, liberated, outspoken individual who happens to be a woman is not easy.....this brings about a crisis in one's attitude. I have lived in metro cities and in small towns the two offer different kinds of loneliness. This is what pushes you into writing. I've dealt with the theme of loneliness as well as the misery of crowded life. (Kalia, 1999:61)

Likewise Dharker presents her views about women-as-writers:

In writing by women—there's an honesty there, a starkness. Women write from a position of strength. Knowing you have traditionally been a victim doesn't make you a victim if you can see and assess what has happened to you. (Dharker,1999:116)

Kalia wants to give vent to her conflicts and crises in her identity through her poetry whereas Dharker wants to analyze and interpret her position as a victim in society through centuries. As Helen Cixous put it, “women must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement.” (Cixous, 1975) So, both poets do so as they feel a compulsion to write and at times when their emotions are heightened, they even don't hesitate to write on the “back of the file covers”. Whatever, they express their feelings freely and frankly.

# Conclusion

Indian literary Feminism has altered the ways of thinking and understanding the complex and nuanced notions of womanhood. Although Indian in origin, Indian literary feminism like all other feminisms, shares trans-cultural concerns; it shares with its other counterparts, emanating from different parts of the world, the desire to rewrite female histories, and to rediscover feminine identity. Literary feminism starts with the premise that “Literature is Male”. Rejecting male mediation, Indian literary feminism today is a dynamic and forceful literary aesthetic. Indian feminists from Tarabai Shinde in 19<sup>th</sup> century to Madhu Kishwar in contemporary times try to reconstruct the various ideologies which subordinate a woman and try to release her striving soul.

So with the rise of feminism in India during the 70s, Indian women writers realized that women have to write about their suppressed selves in order that their voice might be heard. They came to believe that there is a need to represent themselves truly

and freely armed with their feminine sensibilities and experiences. Male authored texts always trivialized and misrepresented women as submissive, virtuous, chaste, homely and devoted to their husbands and family. But, women writers reject their distorted representation by men in literature and then try to reinterpret their identity. They offer an alternative canon to the male literary tradition, which is more autonomous and has a voice of its own. In the process Indian women writers freed themselves from the constraints and pressures of the male literary canon and try to 'Rewrite' themselves.

Through their literary writings they try to relieve themselves from the mythical burden bestowed upon them by male-dominated society. They try to liberate women from 'sexist' stereotyping roles created by patriarchal religious traditions of India on the basis of narrow conceptions of their physically 'weak' nature. Patriarchal ideologies of the myth of the female being inferior which have been internalised to such an extent that only an alternative equal tradition can brainwash it, that is provided by a female aesthetic/tradition. So a female literary canon tries to redefine its identity and role and also tries to realise its claims and rights.

Female writers during the latter part of the seventies and eighties took women-centric themes in their works and registered

their vivid rage against patriarchal structures which left women as exploited, oppressed, tortured, cheated and alienated resulting in their anger and rebellion. It is through literature that women writers try to free women's psyche from these suppressive structures which always marginalized them.

Indian English poetry by women, in particular, on the has made a mark in exploring different feminine sensibilities which is discussed in chapter I in detail. The pre-independence women poets though not speaking explicitly for women's rights, but at the same time promote a strong, free and independent image of Indian women as is evident from poems like Toru Dutt's 'Savitri' and Sarojini Naidu's 'Village Song'. During this period, women poets ignored their own self and preferred nationalistic themes in order to strengthen the freedom struggle. But the women poets after the seventies has emerged as, "unafraid, motivated, clear sighted." (De Souza, 1997:6) They expose quite frankly the realities of Indian marriages, wifhood and motherhood in their poetry which was always idealized and glorified by male poetics. Their poetry shows a remarkable shift in both form and content. They move from romantic to real, conventional to unconventional and national themes to their own personal experiences.

This new generation of women poets lead by Kamala Das provide a freshness and new paradigms to Indian literary feminism. Through their poetry, they try to question male-centricism rejectecting the 'supremacy' of men over women. While describing the conflicts between tradition and modernity, their poetry broke the boundaries set by patriarchal culture in order to assert and reveal themselves. They shifted their focus from spiritualizing love relationships to more authentic sexual and physical needs of women in a frank and uninhibited style. They even did not hesitate to reveal their true relation with their husbands which is not gratifying but devoid of love and emotional understanding. The growing consciousness of their suppression and injustice done to them resulted in their 'rebellious' behaviour. Their resentment and grievances against patriarchal culture in which a male-child is preferred is clearly depicted in their poetry. The pain of being born a girl and tragic fate meted out by them becomes major concern. They raise their voice against these entrenched patriarchal structures which attribute secondary status to women. Sexual harassments faced by these women in their work places by their male bosses/colleagues also find room in their poetry. They revolted against 'home-making' and 'child-bearing/rearing' which is considered as a major hurdle to professional development. Male



writings has always depicted love and marriage the ultimate source of joy/ fulfilment in the lives of women but female alternative writing rejects these claims as they often feel dejected and frustrated in these relations. There is a tension in their poetry caused due to the conflict between a tradition-bound society and their inner desires for freedom and independence from this tradition. Female writers often reject conscious, formalized diction used by male writers and invent a new poetic idiom. As a result, their poetry is more direct, natural and colloquial in style. They use various figurative devices such as irony, sarcasm and imagery in their poetry in order to show their defiance, anger and rebellion.

The poetic tradition inaugurated by Kamala Das did not fade away after her but was followed and strengthened further by poets like Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, etc who not only kept it alive but enriched and widened it by their individual feminine experiences. They adhered strictly to the cause of women; their concerns and issues.

While women poets of the 70s tried to solve the conflicts of tradition and modernity in which they were caught, the poets of the 90s move away from this strident and aggressive mode of behaviour and focus on more contemporary issues women have to deal with in the present complex society which is riddled with

commercialism and religious fundamentalism. Contemporary women's poetry tries to deal with issues like 'sexism' which is still a threat to Indian women resulting in grave crimes against women like murder, rape, torture etc. They try to address a wide range of issues from female foeticide, dowry, rape which are major concerns for our society today. Each woman poet tries to communicate problems of everyday struggles in the contemporary complex world in her own way. Thus while poets Menka Shivdasani, Marilyn Noronha try to solve these problems by meditating and going deep into their inner lives, others like Sampurna Chatterjee try to comprehend present problems from different viewpoints and speak through varied voices- a mother, a man or an acute observer. On the other hand a poet like Jane Bhandari gives us acute details of her observations of day to day contemporary life which she blends with a reminiscent tone. Contemporary women's poetry is in a way the 'mirror of the times' we live in and reflects the complex changing world in which these women poets present their common experiences not only of being women but of being Indian women. So we can say, Indian women poets have enlarged and enriched the dimensions of literary feminism in India by exploring different feminine sensibilities and experiences.

Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker in their own way try to broaden the scope of literary feminism in India through their poetry. They trod the path shown by Kamala Das but also add new dimensions through their distinct cultural experiences.

Mamta Kalia's poetry which is studied in detail in chapter II depicts the predicament of middle class Indian women both inside and outside the family sphere. Through a confessional tone, she exposes the exploitation meted out by women in every sphere of life. Although apparently plain, her poetry is infused with strong undercurrents of irony. Her poetry also exposes the patriarchal setup of the Indian society in which a woman is not secure even today. She portrays the conflicts between traditional structures and an emerging female 'I' which gave rise to a different female aesthetic in modern Indian poetry. Although she has written only two collections of poetry in English, *Tribute To Papa* (1970) and *Poems '78* (1979), but has made a name for herself in Indian English poetry and is considered as a major voice in Indian English poetry by women. We have lost a voice in her as she has switched over to Hindi and never turned back to English again. In Hindi she has 25 books to her credit including novels, short-stories, one act plays etc. Her novel *Beghar* (2007), which is based on a social theme, is a major success which ensured her reputation once again.

She is a regular contributor to leading magazines and is presently director of the Bhartiya Bhasha Parishad in Kolkata. She has been honoured by various awards like Sahitya Bhushan (2004), the Mahadevi Verma Memorial Award (1998), the Yashpal Samman (1985) for her overall contribution to Indian literature.

Imtiaz Dharker is a major feministic voice and chapter III attempted to discuss her poetry in detail. She has five poetry collections in English to her credit apart from ten solo exhibitions of drawings and about 100 short documentary films. She found her poetic voice in India with her first publication *Purdah And Other Poems* (1997) in which she exposes the patriarchal domination which suppresses a woman in a Muslim community. She does not reject her religious beliefs wholly but she is disappointed with the practices of this organised religion. She discards her religious conformity and moves forward by stripping herself naked and then by attaining a new identity in *I Speak For The Devil*. (2001) She raises different concerns and issues of women in Indian society in general and in Muslim culture in particular. Her poetry therefore provides a new dimension to Indian literary feminism. She never stopped writing poetry and her latest collection is *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009) in which she mainly deals with contemporary

issues like journey, home, borderlines between people, countries, cultures etc. After the death of her husband Anil Dharker, she moved to London and presently resides there but travels extensively to other places including Mumbai. Dharker's voice in the contemporary times has not vanished but has grown and developed with changing conditions and new experiences in each collection. She is a globally known poet and is presently a member of 'Poetry Live' (a group which tours the UK encouraging young people to read and write poetry) and performs herself every year. Recently she participated in a poetry celebration event held in London in April 2012 namely 'World Poetry on the underground'. Her poems have been broadcast widely on BBC Radio and on television and are also prescribed for the British AQA- GCSEs (an education certificate) English syllabus. She also acted as a co-judge with Carol Ann Duffy, the poet Laureate of the UK, in a poetry competition in 27<sup>th</sup> June 2011. She has been awarded with Silver Lotus award in 1980 for a short film and Balraj Sahni award for art in 1992. She is highly influenced by poets like Rabbin Burns, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Arun Kolatkar and Agha Shahid Ali. Her poetry is equally contributing to the present era of women's poetry as she gives space to all the contemporary issues and problems of women

apart from dealing with social, political and cultural issues of the contemporary world.

Women poets like Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker have broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English poetry. Their poetry offers authentic notions of womanhood, they are their own representatives and don't need to be represented by others. Chapter IV discusses how they both contribute and enrich Indian literary feminism in similar as well as distinctive ways. They depict their agonies and anguish, observations and experiences, faiths and beliefs by employing varied words and images, both simple and suggestive, through highly evocative poetry. They depict the contemporary life of women objectively and rationally with no pretence. Their response to their observed and living conditions is an essential feature of their poetic art.

To sum up we can say that Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharker in their distinctive ways enrich female writing with their nuanced as well as open rebellion against male centric discourse. In their inner desire of the pursuance of a female identity, these poets challenge complex stereotypical roles bestowed on women and so have effectively displaced Indian writing from its traditional male dominated centers.

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